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Outcome Findings of an Undergraduate Certificate Program in Cultural Competency

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ABSTRACT

In 2010 a Midwestern School of Social Work developed a certificate program named "Critical Cultural Competence" to supplement existing coursework in support of culturally competent practice among graduating bachelor's in social work (BSW) students. This certificate program was popular among social work students and was made available to undergraduate students across the university. Outcome findings from the first four cohorts of students who completed the certificate between 2012 and 2015 show that they made significant positive gains in their appreciation of differences among others and a greater desire to interact with others who are different from themselves. Both the coursework and the study-abroad experiences contributed to these significant differences. At the end of the two-year program, students better understood the meaning of cultural competence and the experience of it as a "journey" rather than a competency that can be achieved.

KEYWORDS

BSW; cultural competency; diversity; social work education

The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy 2.1.4, "Engage diversity and difference in practice" (CSWE, 2015), calls for social workers to "understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity" (p. 7). In Accreditation Standard 3.0, "Diversity" (CSWE, 2015), each program must describe how its learning environment models affirmation and respect for diversity and differences. Coursework promoting cultural competence among future social workers is expected by the CSWE's educational policies and accreditation standards.

Both the educational policy and accreditation standard on diversity reflect the critical importance of culturally competent practice among social workers, including modeling the qualities necessary for culturally competent practice by the social work faculty who train them. This is important because students who enter social work education programs do so with a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a variety of beliefs, values, and attitudes

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toward persons similar to and different from themselves. It is incumbent upon schools of social work to prepare their students for culturally competent practice by helping them to examine how they have been unknowingly socialized to view and respond to individuals in certain ways by family members, peers, communities, and the media.

While our school has long required content on diversity in each of its courses—in support of cultural competence for all graduating students—and requires a course specifically dedicated to "Discrimination, Oppression, and Diversity," the school decided in 2010 to develop a certificate program named "Critical Cultural Competence." The mission of the certificate program, offered to both bachelor's in social work (BSW) students and undergraduates in other majors, is to provide students the awareness and understanding needed to increase their effectiveness in relating across cultural differences and prepare them for life in increasingly diverse domestic and international environments. As a result of the knowledge obtained in the coursework and experiential activities of the certificate program, students are expected to develop an appreciation for their own cultural identities and become *critically self-reflective* in their orientation toward differences in the cultural identities of others. It was this last expectation—critical self-reflection—that became highlighted in the title of the program: *Critical* Cultural Competence.

This article describes the certificate program and documents the outcomes of this program among the first four cohorts of students who began the certificate between 2010 and 2013 and completed it between 2012 and 2015. It provides both quantitative and qualitative findings that document the value of this program in shaping the attitudes of students who participate in the program.

Defining cultural competence and diversity

Traditionally, cultural competence with diverse populations was defined and confined to competence with individuals and groups from non-White racial, ethnic, or cultural origins. However, the term has evolved to include group differences pertaining to gender, sexuality, religion, age, ability, language, nationality, and others (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Razack, 1999; Rothman, 2008). While, historically, our focus on diversity was based on an understanding of racial and ethnic categories, our current focus on cultural competence reflects that of the CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards' (EPAS) Engage in Diversity and Difference in Practice competency (CSWE, 2015) and includes content on the complexity of personal and social identity formation as well as the intersectionality of multiple axes of oppression that underscore social work problems, practices, and interventions. Krentzman and Townsend (2008) defined cultural competence as

having the beliefs, knowledge, and skills necessary to work effectively with individuals different from one's self.

Over time, social workers have recognized that one must understand and appreciate differences among persons and their culture to be able to conduct practice that is congruent with the behavior and expectations of clients—that is, to be culturally competent practitioners (Dewees, 2001; Guy-Walls, 2007). Throughout the United States, the population has become much more diverse (Betancourt, 2004), with rapidly increasing Latino populations and a range of immigrant and refugee populations from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. This growing number of individuals from many cultural, ethnic, and racial groups has heightened our awareness and examination of the terms *cultural diversity* and *cultural competence* for social work professionals and educators.

The concept of *diversity* has also broadened in other ways over the past three decades. The contemporary use of the term also refers to a wide range of human differences such as, but not limited to, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, physical and developmental disabilities, and age. Our recognition of these diverse groups includes not only differences between these groups but also their complex web of meaning within the current sociopolitical context and their relationship to core values such as familial roles, child rearing, and work ethics that are important to understand clients (Lee & McRoy, 2008; Lum, 2008; Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006). Therefore, it is important to be aware of the impact of the "ism's" (racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, elitism, and heterosexism, for example) on ourselves, our clients, and our culture (Harrison, Thyer, & Wodarski, 1996; Van Soest, 2003).

While the importance of culturally competent practitioners might typically be associated with direct (client) practice, it is equally important at more macro levels of practice, such as policy development, analysis, advocacy, and research (D'Cruz, 2007; Harrison et al., 1996; Longres, 1997). Furthermore, social workers who eventually move into supervisory and administrative positions could promote and implement practices that encourage culturally competent practice through leading by example, and critically examining how organizational processes are addressing the cultural and diverse needs of both staff and clients (Guerroro & Kim, 2013; Hernandez, Nesman, Mowery, Acevedo-Polakovich, & Callejas, 2015). Thus, Krentzman and Townsend (2008) emphasize that cultural competence is critically important for students within a generalist practice academic framework.

Cultural diversity and social work education

Even though a social worker recognizes the importance of, and strives for, culturally competent practice, it is unlikely that she or he ever feels truly culturally competent to work with all individuals at all times. With our

rapidly changing global society, achieving cultural competence is an ongoing journey that expands across a lifetime for all individuals—practitioners, educators, and students alike (Allen-Meares, 2007; Cross, 2008; Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006). Consequently, to be an effective practitioner today requires that social workers develop a plan to continually enhance their cultural competence, increase their skills and knowledge to work with diverse clients at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, and reexamine their values and attitudes toward individuals different from themselves.

A growing number of educators, field instructors, and practitioners are discussing the necessary requirements to build cultural competence among social work students (Walls, 2009). Some educators (Meyette, 2014) believe it is imperative to infuse content on specialized populations through the curriculum to ensure that graduating students have the requisite knowledge. Others (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2004) suggest a "course" or "training" for field instructors and students, to increase the cultural competence of both in a practice setting where classroom knowledge can be integrated with practice skills. Still others, such as Aye Loya and Cuevas (2010), found that students who took a nine-session "mini semester" on racism had significant changes in racial attitudes and cultural awareness as a result of their participation. The course included in-class activities, written assignments, and online discussions that aimed to increase student self-awareness on race and culture. Nagda, Gurin, and Lopez (2003), Snyder, Peeler, and May (2008), and Williams-Gray (2014) variously report that in-class assignments, experiential activities, journaling, and class discussions contributed to students' understanding of racial/ethnic inequality and the socio-historical causation of oppression and fostered future efforts to challenge social injustice.

Exposure to topics related to diversity, culture, power, and privilege, along with the critical examinations of one's own views and prejudices, can prove difficult for some social work students (Deal & Hyde, 2004). This journey of self-discovery, although developmentally appropriate and necessary for effective social work practice, can be met with resistance and/or anxiety by students, either due to being overwhelmed by the realization of their own ethnocentrism and privilege status (Carney & Kahn, 1984) or due to a natural uneasiness with the topics, shyness, or being unprepared (Hyde & Ruth, 2002). Therefore, the instruction of issues related to diversity requires the development of pedagogical methods that promote classroom environments that are safe for students to explore new ideas and topics.

Many of the aforementioned suggestions were used in the development of the certificate program. These include, but are not limited to, writing reflection papers, in-class assignments, group projects, giving presentations centered on diversity and/or culture, and exploring culturally diverse events or communities. Furthermore, instructors of the courses in the school take

additional measures to ensure the classroom environment is one that promotes safety and mutual respect. For example, students are provided instruction on how to appropriately respond when they feel hurt and when they disagree with another student's perspective. Also, frequent group processing activities are used to address many of the underlying anxieties and frustrations that students may be experiencing as a result of being exposed to new or difficult content related to culture, diversity, and/or privilege.

History and organization of the certificate program

Beginning in the early 1990s, the school faculty became increasingly aware of the rise of racially/ethnically diverse individuals in the state. To better prepare students to work with this changing demographic, a diversity committee was organized within the school to provide leadership and coordination for diversity activities for students, to develop a model of cultural competency that would be adopted by the school, and to periodically assess the perceptions and needs of faculty regarding diversity issues and curriculum development. The committee's ongoing assessment of the school, along with concurrent conversations with the university surrounding diversity issues, drove the development of the certificate program as a way to influence broader change within the school and the university by enhancing undergraduate student awareness of diversity and oppression in society.

To complete the 18-semester-hour certificate (see Figure 1 for certificate program planning guide), students first enroll in "Foundations in Critical Cultural Competence" (taught by a social work professor). The aim of this course is present to students various conceptual frameworks and models for understanding the cultural differences and similarities within, among, and between diverse groups of people they will interact with in their professional lives. To do this, the course employs a mix of lecture, group activities, and three assignments that emphasize reflection and self-reflexivity: (1) a self-study paper on one's own identity and cultural, racial, and religious affiliations, (2) a privilege paper that asks students to write about how they have personally benefited from belonging in a privileged group, and (3) a reflection paper on experience of attending a meeting or activity of a group with which the student is relatively unfamiliar and culturally different from.

The foundation course is followed by nine hours of elective courses selected from an identified list of approved diversity and/or culture-specific courses. Some of the nine hours of elective courses are taught in the social work program and others are taught in other departments. Cooperating departments and programs that offer diversity-related courses that facilitate cultural competence among the certificate students include (among others): African-American Studies; Native American Studies; Latino Studies; Women, Gender and Society; Aging Studies; and Disability Studies.

COURSE PLANNING SHEET FOR CRITICAL CULTURAL COMPETENCE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Student name and ID#_____ 4 year plan? ☐Yes ☐No

Phone_____ E-mail_____

Advisor_____ Major _____

Prerequisites for Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program

Sophomore standing and completion of Rhetoric. Completion of Interpretation of Lit is also required, but can be waived with permission from the Foundations instructor.

Required Courses:

_____CCCC:2220 * (208:120) **Foundations of Critical Cultural Competence—**3 s.h.

Prerequisites: Sophomore standing and completion of Rhetoric and Interpretation of Literature (may be waived by instructor). Ideally taken during the spring semester of the sophomore year.

_____CCCC:4490 * (208:190) **Integrative Seminar (Capstone)—**3 s.h.

To be taken in the student's senior year; spring semester

Prerequisites: Completion of all other courses required for the Critical Cultural Competence certificate (One course may be taken in the same semester as a co-requisite.)

_____Immersion or service learning course**—**3 s.h.

Electives:

Elective courses (9 s.h.) a minimum of three approved elective courses covering at least two diversity categories (below). A maximum of two electives may be taken from the same department and only one elective may be below the 3000-level. Completion of the elective courses is a prerequisite for the Integrative Seminar (capstone) course. The academic coordinator provides a list of elective options and may approve elective course substitutions.

Diversity categories: Aging, Asians, African-Americans, American Indians and native persons, gender and sexuality, global and international populations, Latinos, religion, theory/practice in cultural diversity, wealth and poverty

Course Number	Course Title	s.h.
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Figure 1. Course planning sheet for Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program.

The certificate program also requires one three-credit immersion or service learning course dedicated to skill development with diverse populations. Students can choose from three, three-week service learning courses offered during the winter in India, Mexico, or Portland, Oregon, or a regular one-semester study abroad to satisfy the immersion requirement. During these courses, students' assignments consist of active participation with the host organization (to be evaluated by the instructor), biweekly journaling, 30 hours of service (if service learning), and group projects and presentations that consist of students (a) evaluating the efforts of the host organization and suggesting ways of improving such efforts or (b) working with the host organization to improve upon or develop a new project.

Upon returning from the immersion/service learning course, students are required to write a paper on their experiences and to reflect on the ways in which their own racial, cultural, and privileged status intersected with those in the community they visited. Students are then required to present their experiences to the class in the form of a formal presentation. The emphasis on immersion/service learning stems from empirical research demonstrating that these types of experiences contribute significantly to academic development, life skills, attitude changes, and a sense of civic responsibility among undergraduates (Astin & Sax, 1998; Quinn-Lee & Olson-McBride, 2012; Rosner-Salazar, 2003).

Finally, students complete a capstone course—"Integrative Seminar in Critical Cultural Competence"—taught by a social work professor. This course requires students to draw upon the knowledge and experiences gained from previous courses in the certificate program and develop a group project that aims to improve cultural competency at the university. Other assignments include students giving in-class presentations on diversity, writing reflection papers that illustrate the ways in which they have grown in their appreciation for other cultures, and developing a portfolio that describes what students have to offer an employer through knowledge of critical cultural competence.

Undergraduate students can earn up to 12 credits for a concentration area for their social work major. Because the certificate program is 18 credits, there were limited extra demands placed on students who wanted to complete the certificate as part of their concentration, and were able to complete the certificate without going beyond the 120 credit hours required for a bachelor of arts/bachelor of science (BA/BS) degree. However, it is unknown if the time commitment proved to be problematic for non-social work majors who may have had different credit requirements in their respective programs.

Although the certificate program was initially conceptualized as a curricular enhancement in diversity for social work students, when the program was put forward for review at the collegiate level, it was approved with the understanding it would be open to all collegiate majors. This proved to be a

strength of the program when it was implemented. With the addition of non-social work majors, there were considerably more viewpoints expressed and explored among students. It had the effect of minimizing "group think" among social work students as they interacted with other majors. In the final seminar of the program—the capstone course—the social work students expressed the value of getting to know students with other majors and learning from them.

Certificate program goals and research question

One of the primary aims of the certificate program is to expand students' understanding and appreciation of issues related to culture and diversity through coursework that promotes critical and self-reflection thinking. Although the word "competence" is found in the full name of the certificate program, the attainment of cultural competence is not a primary goal. In fact, the certificate program was developed with the understanding that one can never be fully "cultural competent." Rather, such a goal is more of a lifelong journey that requires consistent reflection on one's own racial, cultural, and privileged identity in the context of the larger society. As such, the goal of the certificate program is to develop the understanding and skills necessary for this type of self-reflexive thinking and awareness. The development of these attributes is seen as necessary for social workers to effectively engage in the fluid and ever-changing concept of culturally competent social work practice with individuals of diverse backgrounds (Dean, 2001; Heydt & Sherman, 2005; Kondrat, 1999; Saunders, Haskins, & Vasquez, 2015; Yan & Wong, 2005). Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study is, Does completion of the certificate program lead to higher levels of understanding and appreciation of other cultures and diverse people among undergraduate students?

Method

Certificate program participants

A total of 97 students enrolled in the foundation course of the certificate program in its first four years (2010–2013). Eighty-one percent of these students were female. Seventy-one percent were White; 17% were Latino; 7% were African-American; and 5% were other races. During the years 2013–2015, the school had a consistent enrollment of 12% students of color, with university-wide enrollment across those same three years being 13.6 %, 15.4%, and 16.6% respectively. Nine percent of students entering the program were freshmen, 60% were sophomores, 28% were juniors, and 3% were seniors. Almost half of the certificate participants (48%) identified social

work as their major; 34% identified as social science majors (e.g., sociology, political science, and psychology); and 18% were "other majors" (including English, the arts, foreign language) or undeclared. The diversity of students in the program facilitated a program goal of understanding one's own diversity relative to other diverse identities within the class.

Among 97 students enrolled in the first four foundation course cohorts, 90 students completed a pretest (93%). Through May 2015, 65 of the initial 90 "pretest completers" (72%) graduated from the certificate program and turned in the posttest survey. The survey was administered in the capstone courses between 2012 and 2015. Eight of 13 students (62%) who completed pretests in the first foundation course (2010) were matched in subsequent capstone courses; 16 of 22 students (73%) were matched from the second foundation course (2011); 28 of 34 students (82%) in the 2012 foundation course were subsequently matched; and 13 of 21 (62%) were matched from the 2013 foundation course. It is possible that several students in the 2013 foundation course, notably freshmen, remain uncompleted in May 2015 when the most recent posttests were completed and the analysis undertaken.

The remaining 28% of students who were unmatched from pre to post (N = 25) did not complete the certificate or did not complete the posttest: some of these student were only interested in taking the foundation course and others were completing other certificate programs that used the foundation course as part of their certificate options (notability Disability Studies, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship). These unmatched students were not included in the analysis.

Design and procedure

The evaluation of the certificate program employs a pretest-posttest design using survey methodology. Participants are surveyed at the start of the program during the foundation course. They are surveyed again during the capstone course, which occurs at the end of the certificate program. The pre and post survey consists of 43 closed-ended questions, representing four subscales, and four open-ended questions designed to capture students' qualitative reaction to the program (at the beginning and end of the program). Neither the course instructor nor the evaluator are present when surveys are being completed by the participants. Confidentiality was ensured by using ID numbers for participants. The university institutional review board reviewed the study protocol and approved it in April 2010 before the evaluation was initiated.

Data reported in this article are from 65 students who completed the program between 2011 (the second year after program initiation) and 2015 and who completed both pretests and posttests. Their data were matched using the students' initials provided on both the pretest and posttest forms.

Measures

Thirty-four of the closed-ended statements on the survey were taken from or adapted from the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale-Short Form (M-GUDS-S; Fuertes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 2000). The M-GUDS-S assesses the Universal-Diverse Orientation (UDO) construct (Miville et al., 1999), which is conceptualized as "an awareness and potential acceptance of both similarities and difference in others that is characterized by interrelated cognitive, behavioral, and affective components" (Fuertes et al., 2000, p. 156). The UDO is based on the work of Vontress (1986; Vontress, Johnson, & Epp, 1999), who asserts that effective multicultural counseling requires the simultaneous awareness and acceptance of a person's similarities and differences. Because the primary aim of the certificate program is to increase students' awareness and appreciation of issues related to diversity and culture through the presentation of new content and critical reflection of one's own diversity, the M-GUDS-S was believed to be an appropriate evaluative measure. The items contained in the M-GUDS-S represent three subscales: the Diversity of Contact scale, the Relativistic Appreciation scale, and the Sense of Connection scale. It is important to note that for each scale, negatively worded items were recoded during data analysis so that the scale score measured positive attributes of the scale. Another nine of the questions in the instrument were developed by the evaluation team as a subscale to reflect the goals of the program. The open-ended questions were also developed by the evaluation team. Each subscale is described next.

The 15-item Diversity of Contact scale measures the extent to which persons are interested in and committed to participating in diverse, internationally focused social and cultural activities. Ten of the 15 items were stated in the positive direction, such as "I would like to get to know people from other countries," and another five items were stated in the negative direction (i.e., "I rarely listen to music of other cultures"). In earlier studies using this scale, the reliability coefficient alpha was found to be .66 (Fuertes et al., 2000). In this student group, the alpha for this adapted scale was .72. This scale uses a 6-point Likert response set: 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree"). Higher mean scale scores (approaching 6) reflect greater interest in diverse populations. This Likert response set was also used for the other two scales adapted from the M-GUDS-S.

The 11-item Relativistic Appreciation scale measures the appreciation of both similarities and differences in one's self-understanding and personal growth in relation to diversity issues. Seven of the 11 items were stated in the positive direction, such as "I understand someone best when I know how similar and different they are from me," and another four items were stated in the negative direction (i.e., "Knowing how a person is similar to me is the

most important part of being good friends"). In earlier studies using this scale, the reliability coefficient alpha was found to be .64 (Fuertes et al., 2000). In this student group, the alpha for this adapted scale was higher: .73.

The eight-item Sense of Connection scale measures the degree to which persons feel a sense of connection to those both similar and different from themselves. Six of the eight items were stated in the positive direction, such as "Other people's struggle affects me," and another two items were stated in the negative direction (i.e., "Events around the world do not affect me"). In earlier studies using this scale, the reliability co-efficient alpha was found to be .40 (Fuertes et al., 2000), which suggested a low scale reliability. In this student group, the alpha for this adapted scale was higher: .63.

The Program Goals scale is a self-rating of one's awareness, understanding, ability, and empathy for other persons consistent with the goals of the certificate program. This scale included nine items, all of which were stated in the positive direction, such as, "[Rate] Your appreciation for and knowledge of cultural difference." This scale uses a 10-point response set, where "1" is equal to "low" and "10" is equal to "high." A low rating represents a participant who identifies himself or herself as not having, or lacking, the measured characteristics, while a high score represents a participant who believes he or she has these characteristic to a superior degree. At pretest, this scale assessed participants' self-rating of these characteristics at the time they began the foundation course. However, at posttest, the students were asked, in responding to each goal statement, how they rated themselves "thinking back to when you began this program." The idea of the retrospective question, at posttest, was intended to capture students' perception of what they believed to have been their "starting place" in the program. This was then compared against the rating on each goal they actually gave themselves at pretest. The Program Goals scale reliability coefficient alpha scale was found to be high: .90. The scale has strong face validity as each item represents a distinct goal of the program.

Four qualitative, open-ended questions were asked at both pretest and posttest. At pretest, the following questions were asked:

(1) "What do you think will be a challenge for you in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program?"
(2) "Do you feel anxious about participating in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program? If so, what things do you feel anxious about?"
(3) "What do you hope to learn by participating in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program?"
(4) "What are you looking forward to most in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program?"

At posttest, students were asked the following four questions:

(1) "What do you think was the most challenging aspect for you in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program?"
(2) "Did you feel any anxiety while participating in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program? If so, what things did you feel anxious about?"
(3) "What were some important things you learned as a result of participating in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program?"
(4) "What information that you obtained while in the Critical Cultural Competence Certificate Program are you most excited about using after graduation?"

Results

Quantitative findings

The findings in this section represent the 65 students whose pretests and posttests were matched as they completed the certificate program between 2012 and 2015.

For the Diversity of Contact scale, the mean scale score for this matched group of students at pretest was 4.68; the range was 3.0–5.73. On average, the pretest scores are relatively high: well above the midpoint on the rating scale, on average. At posttest, the mean scale score for the matched students was 5.08; the range was 4.0–5.93. The change in mean scale scores from pretest (4.68) to posttest (5.08) was statistically significant (t = –5.78, df = 62, $p < .001$). The data show that students report having a significantly greater appreciation for experiences with other cultures at the end of the certificate program, compared to beginning the program.

For the Relativistic Appreciation scale, the mean scale score for this group of students at pretest was 4.82, also a relatively high pretest score. The range was 3.18–5.82. At posttest, the mean scale score was 5.24; the range was 4.0–6.0. The change in mean scale scores from pretest (4.82) to posttest (5.24) for 65 program completers was statistically significant (t = –5.24, df = 60, $p < .001$). The data show that students report having a significantly greater depth of self-understanding regarding diversity (whether racial, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) at the end of the certificate program, compared to when they began the program.

For the Sense of Connection scale, the mean scale score for this matched group of students at pretest was 4.95, again a relatively high pretest scale score. The pretest scale range was 3.13 to 6.0. At posttest, the mean scale score was 5.37; the range was 4.0–6.0. The change in mean scale scores from

pretest (4.95) to posttest (5.37) was statistically significant ($t = -5.51$, $df = 62$, $p < .001$). The data show that students report having a significantly better appreciation for similarities and differences among others at the end of the certificate program, compared to when they began the program.

For the Program Goals scale, the mean scale score for this group of students at pretest was 5.83, a score above the midpoint on this 10-point scale. The pretest range was 2.0–10.0. At posttest, the mean scale score was 5.37; the posttest scale range was 1.33–9.56. The change in mean scale scores from pretest (5.83) to posttest (5.37) was not statistically significant ($t = 1.52$, $df = 61$, $p = .13$).

Qualitative findings

The qualitative responses, from both the pretest and posttest, were collected and systematically analyzed using a line-by-line coding approach. The initial coding process was conducted separately by a coauthor and graduate student. Once completed, several discussions of the coding schemes occurred between the two coders, which resulted in the organization of codes into specific categories. From these categories, examples were chosen that illustrate how participants confronted their fears/anxieties and developed competencies while in the certificate program.

Pretest

At pretest, participant responses generated four prominent categories related to their anxieties and concerns in taking the certificate program. The first centered on the concern of having to confront bias in others. One participant disclosed that she or he can become frustrated with opposing viewpoints: "If there are people who are really behind me in their journey [of cultural competency] and are vocal, it will be difficult to not be visibly annoyed." The second concern that emerged was the fear of offending others. A representative comment was, "I am worried that my ignorance prior to this class may be insulting to my classmates and that being honest may not be favorable to some of them." The third concern regarded how participants would relate to others who were "different." One participant, for example, admitted that his or her conservative beliefs could be an obstacle to relating to others: "It's hard for me to accept persons who are different from me. My biggest challenge is to break free from my conservative beliefs and values that I've been raised with." The fourth theme that emerged was an overall feeling of uncertainty related to ignorance and lack of experience. As they began the program, several students expressed comments like this one: "The first class showed me that there is so much more to certain cultures than I previously

thought. I'm anxious because I feel as though I do not have as much knowledge or experience as most of my classmates."

The pretest also generated three prominent categories related to what students hoped to gain from the certificate program. Arguably, the most prominent category that emerged was participants' desire to learn more about themselves. A characteristic comment was, "I hope to learn more about my own culture and how to further my understanding of the struggles and the obstacles that society has in place for me just because I am a Hispanic male." The second theme centered on hearing the stories of others and developing friendships. One participant stated, "I can't emphasize this enough, but I'm just looking forward to hearing about everyone and telling everyone about myself because a lot of my friends pretty much had the same background and I was usually the odd one out." The third theme centered on participants' hoping to gain additional insights into other cultures through the immersion learning activities. One of the planned immersion trips was to India. One participant said, "The India trip! [I'm looking forward to] shedding myself of negative attributes, making more friends with people of other cultures, [and] the experience itself."

Posttest

At posttest, two prominent categories emerged concerning the realized anxieties and challenges participants experienced during the certificate program. The first was the need to accept one's own level of privilege. Many participants expressed this process as being one of the most challenging aspects of the program. One participant identified that she or he had to "[come] to terms with privilege and becoming comfortable speaking out against oppression." Another student stated that the most challenging part of the program for her or him was "getting in touch with my own identity and recognizing I too benefit from White privilege. I had to get in touch with my record and confront my biases." The second category that was identified was participants having to speak about personal information and experiences. One participant stated that the certificate program "… really made me step out of my comfort zone, which ultimately made me form a new comfort zone." Another participant admitted that, "Yes, sometimes I would disagree with someone and I feared them becoming angry with me." Many participants reported that the classroom environment felt "safe," which allowed for more freedom when discussing difficult and sensitive issues.

Participants also identified numerous competencies and skills they learned during the certificate program. The analyses of these responses yielded two prominent, interrelated categories. Participants reported viewing themselves as (a) more adept at interacting with different people and groups and, to a greater degree, (b) understanding that cultural competence is a journey. One

participant stated that what she or he learned was "[the] importance of letting people teach me. I am not an expert, but I am open to learning. I have a lot of room to grow, but that's why this is a journey." One participant summed her or his learning experience during the certificate program: "[I learned] how to ask questions, be open-minded, [and that] immersion is incredibly effective."

Discussion

This study's findings suggest the certificate program was successful in enhancing participants' understanding of issues related to cultural competency across three of the four measures: The Diversity of Contact scale, the Relativistic Appreciation scale, and the Sense of Connection scale. There are several possible reasons why improvements were seen across these measures. First, the increase in scores on the Diversity of Contact scale may be attributed in part to students' immersion or study-abroad experience while in the program. Students consistently mentioned, in personal interactions with staff, class discussion, and the posttest qualitative evaluations, how important the immersion learning/study-abroad experience was to their overall learning experience. Similar responses to service learning education are found in the literature (see Astin & Sax, 1998; Quinn-Lee & Olson-McBride, 2012; Rosner-Salazar, 2003).

The increase in scores for the Relativistic Appreciation scale may be attributed in part to the importance given to this topic in the foundation course, its emphasis throughout the electives and immersion learning/service trips, and its reinforcement in the capstone course. Also, the consistent use of assignments that called for the critical analysis of students' own racial, culture, and privilege, along with group processing activities as advocated by Aye Loya and Cuevas (2010), may have also contributed to changes in this measure.

Finally, the increase in scores for the Sense of Connection scale may be attributed in part to the immersion and/or study-abroad experience and efforts to encourage student interaction and respect for differences among persons within their program cohort. Students' pretest qualitative responses attest to the concern raised by many students that their personal biases and conservative belief systems would hinder their ability to fully engage in the content and learn from others different from them, which reflects the concern raised by Deal and Hyde (2004).

Students routinely touted the value of the immersion experience. Many students had participated in school-sponsored trips to India and Mexico to study poverty, microenterprise, and health care or to Portland, Oregon, to study homelessness. They returned from these trips with ideas on how to intervene in impoverished communities in the United States. They also

developed a greater understanding of oppression and provided leadership for initiatives like Black Lives Matter, the Safe Zone Project (a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender resource) project, and the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) program at the university. All of these efforts reflect on the value of the program in changing student perceptions and attitudes toward contemporary cultural- and diversity-related issues. BSW directors and educators alike may consider implementing similar certificate programs at their respective institutions to supplement their diversity content.

Study limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, there is no comparison group; therefore, there exists the potential that the results of the study could have been influenced by factors unrelated to the content presented in the certificate program. Second, approximately one-quarter of the sample who completed their pretest were unmatched at posttest. Those who remained may have viewed the certificate program more positively than those who dropped out or may have been more motivated to obtain the certificate, which could have affected the study's results. Third, the study used a non-random sample of students who voluntarily enrolled (self-selected) to participate in the certificate program. The mere act of enrollment may suggest that the participants understood the importance of cultural competency, and believed additional education on the subject would be beneficial (both personally and professionally). With more than three-quarters of the participants declaring majors in social work or the social sciences, topics such as diversity, culture, and oppression were likely discussed in many of their undergraduate courses. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize these findings to students in other disciplines where there is less of an emphasis on issues related to social justice and diversity.

Because the certificate programs allows students to choose nine credits of electives and choose from various service learning/immersion trips, it is difficult to ensure fidelity and reliability of the program. However, because all of the possible elective courses, along with the service learning/immersion trips, are dedicated to influencing the changes examined by the measures of the study, we believe the results of the study reflect authentic changes in student awareness and understanding of issues related to diversity.

Finally, this study could not differentiate results among participants based on gender or racial differences. Due to the relative lack of racial and gender diversity in the sample population, having students identify, for example, as male and African-American may have inadvertently revealed the identity of the participant. Thus, to protect the identity of study participants, students were not asked on the survey to identify their race or gender. It is unknown

whether students who enjoy more privilege (based on race or gender) have better or worse outcomes in comparison with students who do not experience that privilege. This is also true for students with other disprivilege based on sexual orientation, economic status, ability status, etc.

Recommendations for social work educators

For social work educators who are interested in developing a program similar to the certificate program, we provide several recommendations. First, it is important to note that the development of this undergraduate certificate program was part of a larger effort by the school to ensure that graduating BSW students and undergraduate students across the university embraced a commitment to diversity and culturally competent practice. Such an effort can only be realized when there are solid commitments from social work staff and faculty, and other university departments and administrators. Second, the strength of such a program rests heavily on instructors being willing to challenge students to consider multiple points of view, and to wrestle with their internal biases, prejudices, and fears. As a means of mitigating some of this anxiety, courses should present class time as a safe place in which to explore new ideas, and assignments should provide students an outlet to record and reflect on their thoughts and feelings (e.g., reflection papers, group discussions, etc.). Third, it is important to develop and maintain partnerships with immersion and service learning organizations. Doing so allows for students to focus less on navigating foreign territories, worrying about safety, and/or struggling with language barriers, and more on delving deeper into new cultural experiences. Finally, programs should be regularly assessed to see if there are areas that could be strengthened to better address the needs of students. This can include more standardized assessments of student learning and experiences (e.g., pretesting and post-testing), class discussions that center on student perceptions concerning the program, and informal or scheduled check-ins or meetings among faculty and staff to discuss their needs or concerns.

Conclusion

Because the certificate program was open to other majors at the university, it provided a rich classroom environment to explore a wide variety of opinions about the "ism"s that are a common topic among social work students. The outcome evaluation of this certificate program shows that the students made significant gains in their positive orientation to differences among others, including an appreciation for differences and a desire to interact with others who are different from themselves. Both the coursework and the immersion

experiences (often study-abroad experiences) are believed to have contributed to these significant differences. Students left the program committed to social change both within the university and the larger society.

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