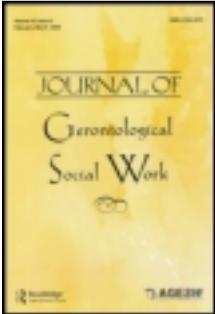


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Enhancing Student Gerocompetencies: Evaluation of an Intergenerational Service Learning Course

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This article describes the development and evaluation of an inter-generational service-learning course designed to promote social work gerocompetencies. Service-learning opportunities were structured into the course, including an optional evidence-based falls prevention program, for older adults, entitled A Matter of Balance (MOB). Significant differences between pre- and posttest scores on the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale (GSWCS) were noted for students in the service learning course (n = 13). Once MOB was introduced as an independent variable, the MOB participants scored the highest mean posttest scores for 2 GSWCS domains:

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values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives; and intervention. The benefits of utilizing social work gerocompetencies to guide course objectives, content, and student outcomes are discussed.

KEYWORDS *Gerontology, social work education, aging competencies, service learning*

INTRODUCTION

Training students in gerontological social work is of growing importance as the aging population increases. By 2030, there will be about 71.5 million older adults, nearly twice the number reported in 2005, representing an increase from 12.4% in 2005 to 20% of the total US population by 2030 (Administration on Aging, 2006). Two decades ago, less than 30,000 US social workers were working at least part-time with elderly populations (Ericson & Tompkins, 2006), but only 3%, or 1071, of the 34,480 masters-level social work students chose aging or gerontology as their concentration (Scharlach, Damron-Rodriguez, Robinson, & Feldman, 2000). By 2010, approximately 65,000 social workers with aging expertise will be needed (Ericson & Tompkins, 2006). Further, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) projects the need for social workers with aging expertise to increase 26% by 2014.

A profound lack of student interest noted in the past, coupled with the near future's growing need for gerontological social workers, concerns scholars in the field. In response, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), with funding from the John A. Hartford Foundation, designed initiatives to "ensure that social workers, both BSW and MSW, are better prepared to improve the quality of life and enhance the well being of older people" (Ericson & Tompkins, 2006, pp. 226). Various initiatives through the Hartford CSWE gero-rich project foster gerontologic infusion into coursework. The CSWE Gero-Ed Center includes Curriculum Development Institute grants for integrating aging content into the social work curriculum, and supports advanced courses in gero mental health and gero substance abuse. The Hartford Partnership Program for Aging Education (HPPAE) also trains leaders in social work and aging by incorporating a university–community partnership model of rotational field placements and competency-based education (Social Work Leadership Institute, 2008). In view of the need to prepare social workers to meet the demands of the aging population, the service learning course described in this article not only addresses the aforementioned concerns in a proactive fashion, it also provides a tool for creating a university–community partnership within a competency-based framework. Therefore, the purpose of this article is twofold: (a) to describe how the development of course and session objectives was guided by the gerocompetencies with an emphasis on service learning, and (b) to report

student outcomes as a result of participating in a university–community partnership course.

Service Learning: University–Community Partnerships

The goal of service learning is to create learning environments that feature direct contact with the subject being studied (Ethridge, 2006). Learning environments are often created within the communities in which an institution is situated—a reciprocal relationship that allows educators to “bring the community into the classroom and vice versa” (Long, Larsen, Hussey, & Travis, 2001, pp. 6). These settings provide students with opportunities to make connections between didactic content and the contexts from which this information is derived. Hands-on experiences, coupled with consistent and appropriate reflection, can strengthen skill sets and influence student attitudes (Long et al., 2001). Long et al. wrote, “Service learning projects must be conceptualized as holistic experiences that have some relationship to a particular course or a student’s gerontology specialization” (pp. 4). It is these “holistic experiences” that Kinsley (1994) believed will lead students to “learn more efficiently, more effectively, and remember what they learned much longer than students who don’t” (qtd. in Weinreich, 2003, pp. 182).

There seems to be a natural fit between the foundational principals of social work education and service learning. Reports of social work service learning activities cover many populations and topics. Some examples include older adults (Cohen, Hatchett, & Eastridge, 2006; Hegeman, Horowitz, Tepper, Pillemer, & Schultz, 2003); youth/young adults (Butler & Coleman, 1997); teenage mothers (Sanders, McFarland, & Bartolli, 2003); adults in need of literacy education (Lucas, 2000); homeless individuals (Forte, 1997); children with burn injuries (Williams & Reeves, 2004) and many others. Elements of the profession including social justice, empowerment, and social responsibility coincide with *civic engagement*, a hallmark of service learning education (Lucas, 2000). When social work students become engaged with individuals in community settings through service-oriented and reflective assignments, they tend to gain a deeper understanding of human needs.

Yet, service learning activities in social work courses have been subjects of criticism. In a recent study, Lemieux and Allen (2007) reviewed literature pertaining to the current state of service-learning within social work education. Service learning is distinct from voluntary community service, where the emphasis is primarily on service; and field practicum with its emphasis on student knowledge. So the Lemieux and Allen review focused on publications pertaining to coursework that included a community-based service learning component. Of the over 250 articles located, only eight met the criteria for service learning. Their review noted a lack of direct contact between students and clients and limitations in research designs that prevented adequate measurement of student, community, and institutional

outcomes. They concluded that, “The scant published research on service learning in social work has not kept pace with the idealism that permeates much of the scholarly literature on social work community practice, as well as the advances in knowledge development in the broader service learning field” (Lemieux & Allen, 2007, pp. 316).

True service learning experiences should maintain as goals personal, as well as interpersonal, development, understanding, and subsequent application of both classroom-based and community-based learning, the development of critical thinking skills, attitudinal transformation, and citizenship skills and values (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Although no one model of service learning may accomplish all of these goals, service learning links classroom theory with real-world experience. It moves students beyond thinking about an issue to acting upon it (Lewis, 2002). The ways faculty members define service learning directly guide the development of learning objectives and activities designed to meet those objectives in a community setting. Evaluation of course objectives is a critical component of any service learning initiative.

These tenets, in conjunction with the positive outcomes associated with intergenerational service learning activities, and the need for social work students to attain gerontological competencies, were the foundation for developing an advanced level, aging-focused social work elective (course). “Perspectives on Older Adults and the Aging Family” was designed with two goals in mind: (a) to promote student learning by using a combination of the HPPAE Gero Social Work Competencies, and the CAL SWEC Gerocompetencies as a foundation for each class session; and (b) to utilize a service-learning framework to provide students and older adults the opportunity to interact with, and learn from one another in multiple settings. A pre-/posttest design, based on self-report was used to evaluate the course’s impact on students. The following section describes the development of the course including an overview of course and session objectives followed by sample class activities and assignments.

Course Development

The HPPAE Social Work Gerocompetencies encompass skill development within four areas: (a) values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives; (b) assessment; (c) intervention; and (d) aging services, programs, and policies. These competencies are available from the CSWE Gero-Ed Center (2010). Ultimately, the HPPAE and CAL SWEC competencies were integrated into 10 course objectives that guided the selection of the class topics, readings, in-class activities, and assignments (Dauenhauer & Fromm Faria, 2007). Figure 1 depicts the framework by which the gerocompetencies guided course development; Table 1 identifies the course objectives.

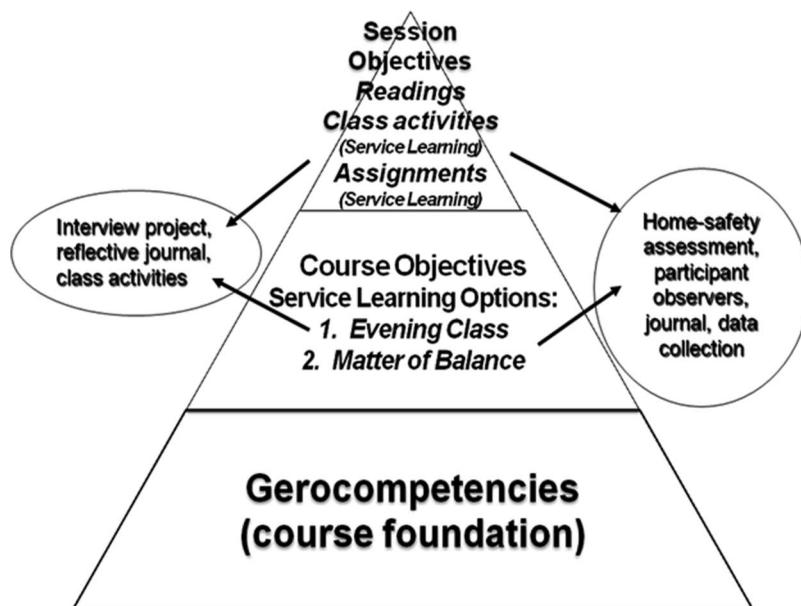


FIGURE 1 Course framework as guided by gerocompetencies.

TABLE 1 Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize inequality in the aging experience as it relates to gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, functional ability, and class.
2. Respect the diversity of cultural, spiritual, and ethnic values and beliefs of older adults and families.
3. Identify how policies, regulations, and programs differentially impact older adults and their caregivers particularly among historically disadvantaged populations (e.g., women and elders of color).
4. Understand the principles of autonomy and self-determination as applied to decision-making with or on behalf of older adults, with special attention to those who have limited decisional capacity.
5. Understand the perspective and values of social work in relation to working effectively with other disciplines in geriatric interdisciplinary practice.
6. Identify ways to outreach to older adults and their families to ensure appropriate use of service continuum that includes understanding the diversity of elders' attitudes towards the acceptance of services.
7. Use educational strategies to provide older persons and their families with information related to wellness and disease management.
8. Include older adults in planning and designing programs.
9. Evaluate the effectiveness of practice and programs in achieving intended outcomes for older adults.
10. Identify and develop strategies to address service gaps, fragmentation, discrimination, and barriers that impact older persons.

Course topics included: family caregiver/care recipient experiences, cognitive functioning and mental status, loss/resiliency, advance directives/end-of-life decision-making, the impact of substance abuse, and elder abuse. Often, a local professional with aging expertise provided an in-class presentation to the students and older adults. A majority of readings utilized peer-reviewed journal articles from social work and related disciplines, as well as Internet-based resources for evidence-based data and practice standards. In-class activities utilized a case study methodology to reflect practice-based situations encountered by practitioners, older adults, and their families. Student assignments included case study analyses, reflective journaling, an older adult interview/analysis paper, and a final research report and presentation on an aging-related issue. The educational resources available at the CSWE Gero Ed Web site were used to identify appropriate readings and case studies.

Course instructors used the following definition of service learning from the National Service Learning Clearing House (2006), "Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (para. 6). Efforts focused on creating a learning environment that would actively promote learning opportunities for both students and older adults, rather than focusing solely on students as recipients of knowledge from older adults. To encourage this exchange, the instructors arranged to host the course at a local, private, not-for-profit senior housing location where older adults were invited to participate in the course activities. This location is home to approximately 400 older adults with varying degrees of independence. Older adults were invited to participate in the course via a monthly newsletter and closed circuit television announcements. These announcements briefly described the course topic being discussed and guest presenters. Thus, participation in the course sessions was optional for residents—individuals could attend one session, or all sessions depending on their interest.

Building upon readings, case studies, and assignments, multiple opportunities for service learning engagement were incorporated into each class session. The most common opportunity for interaction between older adults and students occurred during group discussion of the topic at hand. The class would begin with a formal presentation on a predetermined aging-related topic. Following the presentation, the instructors would facilitate a group discussion in which older adults, students, and instructors shared their thoughts and experiences in relation to the topic. This format allowed students and older adults to listen to each other's perspective and ask clarifying questions.

A second, in-class opportunity for engagement focused on topic-guided small group discussions and class exercises. For each session, students and older adults were provided a case study relevant to the class session topic

along with a series of questions to guide their small group discussion of the case study. These groups included three to four participants, with equal numbers of students and older adults. After approximately 15 min, the class would reconvene and each group would report the salient features from their discussion. During these activities, students learned from the experiences of older adults, and older adults learned about the provision of social work and community services. This interaction broadened students understanding of the different contexts in which the case study example may have been experienced by older adults in the class. Both students and older adults also used this activity to explore common values and interests, and to identify different perspectives among and between cohorts. Table 2 provides an overview of a typical class session. The focus of this class described in the table is cognitive functioning and mental health status.

The instructors also developed a gerocompetency-based interview assignment as a third opportunity for students and older adults to engage one another. Students approached an older adult from the class and set a meeting to explore one of four selected social work gerocompetencies. Three of the competencies and suggested interview activities were from the domain of *values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives*. These competencies and topics included:

1. Addressing the cultural, spiritual and ethnic values and beliefs of the older adult. For this competency, students were encouraged to practice a spiritual life mapping activity demonstrated in class;
2. Identify issues related to losses, changes and transitions. Students focusing on this competency were provided guidance to explore resiliency and coping strategies useful in adapting to past losses; and

TABLE 2 Class Session Example: Cognitive Functioning and Mental Health Status in Older Adults: The Impact on Individuals and Families

Class session objectives:

1. Identify the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety in older adults.
2. Describe assessment tools (i.e., MMSE, Depression Scale, etc.).
3. Identify the impact of cognitive and mental health issues on family caregivers.
4. Describe ways to enhance coping capacities and mental health of older persons through a variety of interventions.

Class activities:

1. Gero-Psychiatrist presentation on dementia and depression assessment and evidence-based intervention findings
 2. Case study presentation (composite older adult presenting with cognitive decline and depressive symptoms)
 3. Small group discussion of case study (older adults and students)
 4. Review of journal article focusing on cognitive decline and depression (student leads journal review of a required reading journal article, older adults invited to participate in discussion)
-

3. Support persons dealing with end-of life issues related to dying, death and bereavement. Guidance regarding the choice of this competency provided opportunities to understand the comfort level of the older adult in discussing advance directives and treatment options with health care professionals and family members;
4. The fourth competency, “Identify and develop strategies to address service gaps, fragmentation, discrimination and barriers that impact older adults,” is from the *aging services, policies, and programs* domain. Students focusing on this competency focused the interviews on the older adult’s experience with meeting their needs (e.g., health, housing, finances and medications).

To complete this assignment, students met twice with an older adult outside of class. The purpose of the first meeting was to establish rapport with the older adult and decide which of the aforementioned competencies the older adult may like to discuss at the second meeting. Upon completion, students submitted an analysis of the interview in which they described the interviewee, indicated how the competency focus for the interviews was determined, reported what they learned from the interview process and provided a self-assessment of their own skill and knowledge specific to the chosen competency.

A fourth and final opportunity to engage older adults and students centered on an evidence-based falls prevention program called *Matter of Balance* (MOB). MOB is a structured cognitive-behavioral program whose goal is to reduce older adult participants’ fear of falling (Healy et al., 2008; Tennstedt et al., 1998). Results from a recently-published randomized clinical trial by Healy et. al. (2008) indicate that participants experience the following benefits: (a) improved falls self-efficacy defined as confidence related to performing everyday activities; (b) improvement with falls management described as confidence in one’s ability to manage falls by increasing physical strength, becoming more steady, and finding a way to get up if a fall occurs; and (c) falls control, the belief that falls can be prevented and that one can overcome fear of falling.

Following a comprehensive training program, group leaders known as *coaches* deliver the program in a series of eight 2-hr sessions once a week, or four 2-hr sessions twice per week. The MOB classes are limited to 12 older adults. Because many of the structured cognitive-behavioral activities seemed conducive toward the integration of student/older adult interaction, one of the faculty members completed MOB training and offered the program as a service learning option for interested students.

This optional MOB service learning component took place outside of the normally scheduled course. During each of the MOB sessions, students actively participated and interacted with older adults in the program through individual and group discussions. Requirements included a weekly one-page summary of the student’s experiences. Students participating in MOB also

met with an older adult participating in MOB to review a home safety checklist. As part of this process, students described their experience and at least three gerocompetencies they learned about from this activity. Students who participated in MOB interacted with the same group of older adults for 8 weeks and reflected on their experiences. Recognizing the extra time needed to accomplish the service learning goals of MOB, students who chose to participate were exempt from completing a research paper required for the course.

The development of this service learning course represents a deliberate, methodological attempt to enhance student gerocompetencies—a need that is clearly acknowledged in the current gerontological, social work, and service learning literature. The following pages describe course-related student outcomes.

METHOD

Design and Procedure

As a new aging-related service learning course designed to promote foundation-level social work gerocompetencies, this study aimed to assess student outcomes using a group pre-/posttest design. During the first class session held on-campus, students were given a consent form describing the purpose of the study and a series of quantitative measures. On the final day of class, held on-site at the independent living center, posttest measures were administered to students. This study and related measures were approved by the College at Brockport's Institutional Review Board.

The following questions guided the evaluation of this course: (a) Does participation in an intergenerational service learning social work elective affect students' reports of aging-related knowledge and attitudes?; and (b) Is there is a difference in aging-related knowledge and attitudes between students who participate in an optional falls prevention component in addition to regularly assigned course activities?

Participants

The all-female student sample ($n = 13$) included a predominantly White ($n = 12$) cohort of college students (Range = 19–45 years; $M = 28.31$ years; $SD = 8.59$). A majority ($n = 9$) were graduate social work students. The remaining four students included two undergraduate social work majors, one undergraduate nursing major and one interdisciplinary health major. Slightly more than half ($n = 7$) participated in the MOB falls-prevention program, of which five were graduate students. The Non-MOB group consisted of the remaining students ($n = 6$) that participated in the evening Aging Family course only. Of these six participants, four were graduate students, and two were undergraduates. Three of the graduate students participating in

MOB were also participating in the Hartford Partnership Program in Aging Education Project.

Materials

This study used both quantitative and qualitative measures to determine student learning outcomes. Quantitative measures included demographic questions pertaining to age, gender, race/ethnicity, and academic major. Instruments used to track student outcomes included the Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale (GSWCS; Damron-Rodriguez, 2006a), the Working with Older People Scale (WOPS; Seperson & Hegeman, 2002), and a revised Aging Semantic Differential Scale (ASDS; Eisendorfer & Altrocchi, 1959; Krout & McKernan, 2007; Rosencranz & McNevan, 1969). Qualitative data were collected through students' electronic journal submissions and interview analysis papers. Outcomes described in this article focus primarily on results of the quantitative measures.

According to the Social Work Leadership Institute (2005), the GSWCS is designed "to measure the level of skill competency of social work students and practitioners, specializing in aging, in practice with older adults and their families" (p. 1). The 40-item instrument was jointly developed by the Geriatric Social Work Education Consortium and the Council on Social Work Education to assess graduate students' competencies as part of the Hartford-funded Practicum Partnership Program (Damron-Rodriguez, 2006a). Participants are asked to assess their skill level with regard to geriatric social work practice. Questions are divided into four domains: (a) values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives; (b) assessment; (c) intervention; and (d) aging services, programs, and policies. Participants rate their skill level from 0 (*not skilled at all*) to 4 (*Expert skill*). The instrument is reported to have strong face validity (Social Work Leadership Institute, 2005). Recent data from nearly 500 HPPAE students indicates the instrument has high reliability ($\alpha = 0.97$; Nakao, Damron-Rodriguez, Lawrance, Volland, & Bachrach, 2008). See Damron-Rodriguez (2006a, 2006b) for a detailed review of the development of the competencies.

The WOPS includes eight questions developed by Seperson and Hegeman (2002) to assess the effect of intergenerational service learning on college students. Rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), examples of questions include, "People who work with older adults have interesting jobs," and "I don't have the ability to work successfully with older people." This instrument has not been formally tested for reliability and validity (K. Pillemer, personal communication, June 4, 2008).

A modified version of the ASDS was used to measure perceptions of older adults. The original instrument, developed by Rosencranz and McNevan (1969), uses bipolar pairs of adjectives whereby participants rate from 1 to 7 where the average person aged 65 and older would be within

this pairing. For example, *idle-busy*. The instrument used in this study, as described by Krout and McKernan (2007), uses two scales. The evaluative scale, developed by Eisendorfer and Altrocchi (1959), consists of 11 questions that measure student perceptions of older adults' personal characteristics. The instrumental scale (Rosencranz & McNeven, 1969) includes 9 items that measure perceptions of older adults' effectiveness in society. Multiple variations of this instrument have been used in numerous studies since its development with acceptable levels of reliability (Intrieri, von Eye, & Kelly, 1995).

RESULTS

Analysis was conducted in two ways. First, using the entire sample of participants, and then comparing the MOB participants to non-participants (Non-MOB).

Pretest/Posttest Comparison: All Participants

For all three instruments, paired-samples two-tailed *t*-tests were conducted to identify significant differences between pre- and posttest mean scores for all students, regardless of MOB participation. As seen in Table 3, results indicate the posttest mean scores were significantly higher than the pretest mean scores for all four areas of domain within the GSWCS: values, ethics, and theory, $t(12) = -6.48$ ($p < .01$); assessment, $t(12) = -6.97$ ($p < .01$); intervention, $t(12) = -6.27$ ($p < .01$); and aging, services, and policies, $t(12) = -4.97$ ($p < .01$). Significant differences were also found on the WOPS, $t(12) = -2.63$ ($p < .05$), yet no significant differences were revealed between the ASDS pretest and posttest mean scores, $t(12) = -1.51$ ($p = .16$).

TABLE 3 Pretest/Posttest Mean Scores for All Participants

Scale	Mean scores	
	Pretest	Posttest
Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale		
Values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives**	2.15 (.76)	3.25 (.35)
Assessment**	1.80 (.44)	3.06 (.89)
Intervention**	1.82 (.87)	3.15 (.37)
Aging services, programs, and policies**	1.60 (.91)	2.97 (.48)
Working With Older People Scale*	3.27 (.26)	3.45 (.38)
Aging Semantic Differential Scale	4.74 (.45)	5.03 (.65)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 4 Pretest/Posttest Comparisons: Matter of Balance (MOB) Versus Non-MOB

Scale	Mean scores			
	MOB		Non-MOB	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Geriatric Social Work Competency Scale				
Values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives**	2.12 (.92)	3.39 (.38)	2.18 (.60)	3.08 (.28)
Assessment**	1.66 (1.05)	3.01 (.51)	1.97 (.83)	3.11 (.39)
Intervention**	1.71 (1.09)	3.17 (.38)	1.95 (.60)	3.12 (.39)
Aging services, programs, and policies**	1.47 (1.11)	2.90 (.34)	1.75 (.68)	3.05 (.64)
Working With Older People Scale	3.24 (.23)	3.41 (.37)	3.29 (.30)	3.50 (.42)
Aging Semantic Differential Scale	4.69 (.56)	5.31 (.57)	4.80 (.31)	4.70 (.61)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

** $p < .01$.

Pretest/Posttest Comparison: MOB Versus Non-MOB

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with MOB as the independent variable and the aforementioned mentioned student outcomes as dependent measures. As displayed in Table 4, significant differences ($p < .01$) were found between groups in all of the four GSWCS domains, while differences between the Non-MOB and MOB groups on the WOPS and the ASDS were not significant.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that intergenerational service learning coursework may help foster geriatric competencies among graduate and undergraduate social work students. However, there are several limitations to be considered when interpreting the findings. The small sample of 13 students suggests that these results may not generalize to other students and settings. There may also be a self-selection bias for students who registered for this course. Because it was an elective, students with interests in aging may have signed up. This also relates to the HPPAE students who may have been sensitized to aging issues given their unique field practicum experiences. Instrumentation is another concern as the GSWCS is a relatively new instrument in need of further testing to determine its reliability and validity. A larger sample is needed to assess internal consistency of this measure. It is also a self-report instrument that does not provide an objective measure of competency. Further, the WOPS and the ASDS may be better suited for assessing attitudes toward older adults in more general student populations given the potential self-selection bias for this course. These

measures are also not designed to assess specific skills/competencies such as the GSWCS.

Although these limitations exist, the results provide evidence for improvements in student learning. All students who participated in the intergenerational service learning course reported significantly higher scores as measured by the GSWCS and the Working with Older Adults Scale. These findings are similar to those reported by Damron-Rodriguez (2006a) during the development phase of the GSWCS with graduate social work students in field practica. Slightly higher, but not significantly different pre- and posttest scores on the WOPS and the ASDS may be due to the fact that students reported moderately positive attitudes at the start of the course. Thus, there was not much improvement in these high scores. This also relates to a self-selection bias as students who chose this elective course having an interest in aging. It should also be noted that undergraduate students were required to have an introductory gerontology course as a prerequisite.

Comparing results from MOB and Non-MOB students revealed that MOB participants scored the highest posttest mean scores for two of GSWCS domains: *values, ethics, and theoretical perspectives* and *intervention*. MOB participants also scored highest for the ASDS. These results may relate to the repeated 8-week interaction with the same older adults participating in the MOB class; regular participation was a requirement for older adults who engaged in this evidence-based program, along with the students. This allowed students to build relationships (i.e., trust, rapport, communication) with this consistent cohort of older adults through structured activities and reflective assignments. Because the MOB class was an intervention to address fear of falling, it is not surprising that students scored higher in this domain (*intervention*) than non-MOB students. One also needs to consider that three of the MOB students were actively involved in the HPPAE, which may have positively affected the students' engagement in MOB and self-reported outcomes.

In contrast, students who chose not to participate in the optional MOB program continued to have opportunities to interact with older adults through the regular course activities (case studies, group discussions, etc.), but participation by older adults was optional. In other words, older adults had the choice of attending class based upon their interest in the topic being covered that day. A few older adults attended most class sessions, and students seemed to develop close bonds with these individuals. These bonds also appeared to be strengthened further when the older adult interviewed for the service learning assignment attended multiple class sessions. Engagement with these older adults included anniversary and birthday celebrations and expressions of concern when one of the older adults was hospitalized. In contrast, the instructors also observed that close relationships did not develop between students and older adults for those that participated in only 1–3 class sessions throughout the semester.

The finding that Non-MOB students achieved the highest posttest mean scores on the GSWCS *assessment* and *aging services, programs, and policies* domains may be due to the fact that non-MOB students were required to conduct an in-depth interview with an older adult, as well as a formal research paper/presentation on an aging issue highlighting the importance of social policy. In an attempt to balance time commitments and encourage participation, MOB students were not required to complete the interview and research paper assignments.

Multiple opportunities for service learning engagement were incorporated into each class session including the optional MOB component which took place outside of the normally scheduled course. Collectively, student participation in these activities may have influenced the differences in scores as measured by the GSWCS. Although not the purpose of this study, the design and the quantitative instruments used cannot determine the unique contribution of each service learning component.

Lemieux and Allen (2007) suggested that social work educators adopt a clear definition of service learning to develop and assess outcomes associated with student and community participation. For the course, a clear definition of service learning along with the Geriatric Social Work Competencies as a foundation for course/session objectives helped faculty to select readings and develop opportunities for students and older adults to better understand course content. These tenets also guided the methods used for measuring student outcomes.

What the quantitative instruments, including the GSWCS, do not capture is the dynamic interaction between many students and older adults when discussing a topic as a class, or in small groups. Based on the qualitative analysis of reflective journals (Faria, Dauenhauer, & Steitz, 2010), students described their interactions with elders as being critical to the successful accomplishment of the course objectives. Although these interactions were guided by the explicit, structured activities of the course, the interpersonal exchanges between students and elders were unstructured and dynamic. Students provided detailed accounts of how their relationships with older adults helped to integrate course content in meaningful ways not experienced in more traditional courses. As described by other scholars (Brown & Roodin, 2001; Eyler & Gyles, 1999; Rhoads, 1998), these findings underscore the importance of using semistructured reflective assignments to assess service learning methodology.

Because the focus of this research was on the measurement of student outcomes, limited information was collected from the older adult participants. As this model of service learning emphasizes mutual interaction, we emphasize the need to collect formal outcomes from older adults along with students.

Social work education continues to make great strides in preparing practitioners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to provide effective services for older adults and their families. This course serves as model

for enhancing gerocompetency-based education by actively engaging older adults and students in the learning process.

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