

Why They Stayed: Factors that Influenced BSW Student Persistence**Janet M. Joiner***Department of Social Work, University of Detroit Mercy
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This study explored factors that influenced African American and Caucasian student decisions to persist in Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs. Council on Social Work Education reported 56,530 students were enrolled in 533 BSW programs during 2020. Students pursuing BSW education have options when selecting a program to attend. Once admitted, BSW students tend to persist if they perceive the program meets their academic and social needs. Examining these reasons by race has not been the focus of previous research. Three differences were found between African American and Caucasian students related to choosing their programs, including their program was close to home, up-to-date technology in their programs, and availability of academic resources. No differences were found among students regarding perceptions for persisting in their programs. Findings can be used by BSW program administrators to understand factors that can be emphasized to retain students in social work programs.

Key Words: BSW students, program attributes, articulation agreements enrollment, Midwest

Introduction

In 1974, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the national body for social work education, began accrediting undergraduate social work programs. Since the early inception of baccalaureate social work instruction, undergraduate programs have continued to gain attention, expanding in numbers steadily (Robbins et al., 2016). As of October 2020, 533 accredited undergraduate social work degree programs were operating across the United States (CSWE, 2021). A CSWE (2021) report titled, “2019 Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States,” indicated a total of 56,530 students were enrolled in undergraduate social work programs. The majority of these students were enrolled full-time, with approximately 85.8% reporting as female.

Each year, researchers from CSWE administer a survey to all accredited social work academic programs to collect and process a comprehensive body of demographic student, faculty, and program related data. These data are organized and shared publicly on the CSWE website. Findings from the CSWE annual survey provide important information regarding the health and stability of social work education (Robbins et al., 2016). Research findings based on student enrollment, race/ethnicity, degree completion rates, and student loan debt could help colleges and university administrators forecast future trends and potential challenges. Data collected can be used by social work faculty to develop policies and practices to enhance overall program operations (Beadlescomb, 2019).

CSWE has amassed a substantial collection of facts and figures related to social work program operations. However, no CSWE research was identified that explored how students selected a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program in which to enroll or why once admitted students persisted in their programs. Berger (1992) indicated that few research studies have

focused on understanding factors that could influence student persistence in BSW programs. Beadlescomb (2019) supported this contention, adding that no studies were identified that examined program persistence of BSW students of color.

Literature Review

More than 7,700 four-year colleges and universities provide graduate and undergraduate education across the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2021). NCES indicated on their website that during Fall 2019, approximately 19,720,000 students attended American colleges and universities, with 61% enrolling full-time, and 57% reporting as female.

A large body of research exists that explores how general population students selected their colleges and universities to attend (Chen & Zerquera, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Niu & Tienda, 2008; Pope & Fermin, 2003). Published scholarship is rich with studies that identified factors that influenced student decisions about their choice of academic major (DiMaria, 2003; Grupe, 2002; Kim, 2020; Snelling & Boruch, 1970; Yazici & Yazici, 2010). Some studies investigated why students persisted in a certain academic institution through to graduation (Bandura, 1977; Boyd et al., 2020; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Rasheem & Brunson, 2017; Tinto, 2017a, b).

Chen and Zerquera (2018) studied a specific population of high school students and found that learners selected their colleges and universities to attend based on a variety of factors. These factors included student perceptions about their ability to gain admission to a particular institution, ability to achieve academic success, perceived cost-to-benefit ratio of attending a certain college, and college-going habitus. Some students selected their institution on the basis of proximity to home or work (Garza & Fullerton, 2018; Hillman, 2016; Turley, 2009), and tuition

costs (DiMaria, 2003; Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Stater, 2011). Other students selected their institution based on college-going culture (Chen & Zerquera, 2018; Johnston, 2010), generous community college articulation agreements (de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Montague, 2012), and perceptions related to college or university friendliness (An, 2010; Balloo et al., 2017; Squire & Mobley, 2015).

Research by Grodsky and Riegle-Crumb (2010) described college-going habitus as an expectation that an individual will attend college following high school, for some going to college is viewed as a rite of passage. These authors argued that conscious and unconscious expectations for college enrollment can be communicated to an individual early in life.

Researchers (Chen & Zerquera, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Hlinka, 2017; Luedke, 2020) have concentrated on college-going habitus and have included a focus on the influence of cultural background and the value placed on institutional prestige.

Student Persistence

Retention of college students has been a challenge for many institutions, with research by Tinto (2017a, b) revealing that higher education administrators tended to view retention differently than students. Tinto argued that college and university leaders often viewed retention as the act of successfully keeping a student enrolled, which directly benefited the institution.

Tinto (2017a, b) added that students often did not view themselves as being retained, but instead saw themselves as persisting to degree completion. Some students who successfully persisted in college faced myriad obstacles, including feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation that could derail their enrollment (Clark & Brooms, 2018). Students who successfully persisted often developed healthy coping mechanisms, and self-efficacy that allowed them to master difficult experiences, while building new life skills (Beadlescomb, 2019).

Bandura (1977) is credited with introducing the concept of self-efficacy. He describes self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully manage a challenging or fear-inducing situation. The concept of self-efficacy can be observed in a student with a fear of or aversion to a specific subject area. With self-efficacy, a student struggling academically may be motivated to seek tutorial assistance to address academic deficits. Engaging in proactive steps could lead the student to improved academic outcomes and greater likelihood for college persistence. Students with positive self-efficacy experience hesitancy and fear, but often quickly mobilize and engage with others to address potential obstacles and concerns. Some students who lack positive self-efficacy could become overwhelmed by their circumstances. Lacking confidence, some of these students could engage in avoidance behaviors, leading to less desirable academic outcomes that could impact their ability to persist successfully.

Bowden (2008) completed a research study with 46 former nursing students who completed a full-time, three-year nursing program but indicated that they almost left the program prior to degree completion. Factors that prompted students to consider leaving the nursing program included exam-inducing stress, expectations for students to adopt a certain style of writing, and fear of academic failure. Other reasons given included stress related to the practicum experience and concerns related to financial hardships. When asked what factors influenced their decisions to stay, the students shared that using self-help strategies was instrumental in their ability to persist, along with support from faculty, academic support staff, classmates, friends, and family.

Johnson et al. (2014) studied persistence of 1,491 undergraduate White students and students of color attending a predominantly White research institution. Institutional responsibility for creating and sustaining a welcoming racial climate on campus was important in

retaining students. Persistence decisions of students of color often were influenced by feelings of belonging and experiences with racism and discrimination on campus that impacted their commitment to the institution. Persistence decisions of White students were primarily influenced by levels of personal academic achievement and perceived readiness for social interactions on campus. Being aware of factors that could influence program experiences and academic achievement of BSW students could help social work program administrators and faculty understand why certain students persist to graduation (Beadlescomb, 2019; Berger, 1992).

Kim (2020) studied 221 food service and culinary arts majors who attended one of six universities in Korea to explore the relationship between selection of an academic major as a primary influence on college persistence. Research findings revealed that study participants who selected their universities based on personal compatibility and aptitude persisted to graduation at higher rates than peers who selected their institutions based on department or institutional reputation. Study results revealed that having satisfying relationships with fellow peers and program faculty had a significant influence on student academic achievement and persistence.

Hlinka (2017), using Tinto's theory of student persistence, conducted interviews with 13 students attending a community college in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. Study findings revealed that a myriad of factors could influence student decisions to persist in college. Factors shaping student decisions to remain enrolled in college included the value that students' families and communities placed on education, ability to manage family and related responsibilities successfully, and ability to be successful with college academic work.

Why They Stayed?

To address student persistence, BSW degree program leaders make a wide range of voluntary extra-curricular and leadership development activities available to their learners (Curl

& Benner, 2017). Program-specific activities can help address student professional and academic development, while strengthening student sense of belonging and BSW program connectedness (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Social work degree programs with available resources to provide students with targeted academic and social support could be influential in student decisions to stay and persist to graduation. Social work programs with culturally and ethnically diverse faculty and staff could be influential for some students of color when making decisions to persist in their social work programs (Cross et al., 2013). Davis et al. (2019) indicated that “social belonging and academic performance are both strong predictors of retention that are not necessarily correlated” (p. 117). Beadlescomb (2019) supported this assertion, maintaining that it is important to understand why students of color tend to have lower rates of persistence in BSW programs than Caucasian students.

Feeling valued, known, and appreciated by program faculty are factors that have been identified as influencing BSW student motivation, engagement, and learning (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Helping students to feel heard, valued, and empowered in the classroom can be instrumental with developing their sense of belonging, which can directly impact academic performance and decisions to persist (Davis et al., 2019; French & Westler, 2019). Some social work programs self-identify as student-centered and student-friendly, with an emphasis placed on the student and how they choose to engage within the course and the material.

Many student-centered teaching institutions advertise their ability to offer classes taught by accessible, accomplished faculty who care deeply for their students and their students’ success. Certain students who prefer student-centered personal learning environments, with the ability to get to know their faculty and vice versa may be more likely to thrive academically and persist (French & Westler, 2019). Students who are placed at the center of learning by caring and

responsive faculty who get to know them by name often develop positive perceptions about their learning experiences (French & Westler, 2019; Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Research (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013) indicated that students who felt engaged in learning and are known by their faculty participated in class and took risks, developing their voice and confidence. Students who feel valued by faculty and staff with whom they interact, often develop feelings of connectedness and attachment to the institution (Astin, 1993).

Two research studies focused on students of color enrolled in BSW programs (Beadlescomb, 2019; Berger, 1992). Many BSW degree programs are structured to allow students to enroll full or part-time, with courses scheduled traditionally on-ground, hybrid, and/or fully online. Presenting students with flexible course scheduling options, and institutional supports (i.e., tutoring, program specific academic advisors, and professional mentors) could result in students feeling valued and appreciated; therefore, impacting student persistence. Berger (1992) conducted research with 352 predominantly African American and Hispanic students admitted to the Lehman College (LC) BSW program over a seven year period. Nearly 64% of study participants were over 25 years of age, and approximately 50% were married, divorced, separated, or widowed with one or more children. Study findings revealed that the majority of students ($n = 250$, 71%) completed the LC BSW program. Berger indicated that institutional supports, such as remedial courses, academic advising delivered by program faculty, flexible course scheduling options, and learner motivation aided with student persistence to degree completion.

Research by Beadlescomb (2019) explored the issue of attrition with BSW students of color to determine what social work program leaders could do to influence persistence in their programs. Research findings indicated that levels of persistence and subsequent degree

completion of BSW learners of color could be enhanced if they felt empowered through shared leadership activities, decision-making opportunities, and extracurricular options. Beadlescomb (2019) argued that academic leaders should consider “institutional subculture as it relates to students’ sense of belonging, the degree of student-faculty interaction, and students’ perception of classroom inclusion” (p. 220) when addressing persistence of BSW students of color. Hildegard (2020), citing Tinto’s model of student integration, underscored the importance of creating a welcoming campus environment to facilitate student academic integration and sense of institutional fit. Creating opportunities for BSW student program engagement could be influential in helping social work students to persist through to graduation (Bowie et al., 2018; Curl & Benner, 2017; Robbins et al., 2016; Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013).

Research has revealed myriad reasons students indicated for remaining enrolled in a particular college or university (Boyd et al., 2020; Clark & Brooms, 2018; Rasheem & Brunson, 2017; Tinto, 2017a, b). However, a dearth of research found that focused on factors that motivated undergraduate students of color to remain enrolled in their social work program through to graduation. Identifying factors that shaped student decisions to persist in a certain BSW program is important as the number of available BSW programs continue to increase. A gap exists in the literature regarding specific factors that are influential in increasing persistence rates of students of color in social work degree programs (Bowie et al., 2018).

Current Study

The current research study explored factors that influenced undergraduate students to remain enrolled in their respective BSW program. The study investigated if African American and Caucasian students differed in why they decided to persist with their particular BSW program and what factors were most influential in their decisions to stay. The study included 80

respondents who met the criteria for research participation. The respondents were enrolled in either a small, private, urban teaching institution or a large, public, research-intensive university.

Description of Institutions in the Current Study

The focus of the current study is on BSW students who enrolled in one of two different BSW programs, known as University A and University B during fall 2018. The BSW programs are located 6.8 miles apart in a large urban city. The institutions housing the BSW programs include a small private liberal arts university (University A) steeped in the Jesuit tradition with a total student population of approximately 4,000. The other institution (University B) is a large public institution ranked by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as Very High Research Activity (R1) with a total student population of nearly 27,000. Each institution offers unique amenities that attract students for enrollment and could influence students to persist to BSW degree completion.

The Department of Social Work at University A offers students access to a stand-alone BSW degree program that provides competency based education focusing on ethical, competent, generalist professional social work practice (Personal communication, Department Chair, June 6, 2022). Department faculty provide academic and career advising to pre-social work and BSW program students. To increase BSW student enrollment, during Fall term 2015, University A collaborated with a large area community college to offer a part-time BSW cohort option. The per-credit tuition rate for BSW part-time students was calculated at approximately half the rate paid by traditional students enrolled at the university. The cohort option was conveniently located on the partner community college campus, resulting in overall BSW enrollment that tripled during the first year of the part-time program. The part-time BSW cohort option featured

a generous articulation agreement, with up to 82-credit hours applicable toward the minimum 126 credits needed for degree completion.

University A had a total of 49 full and part-time BSW students enrolled during fall 2018. Social work courses were offered traditionally on ground, hybrid, and fully online. Students interested in extracurricular activities could participate in Phi Alpha Honor Society and/or the Student Social Work Association (SSWA), the umbrella organization for social work majors. Students who require academic and/or tutoring assistance can receive support from the university's Student Success Center (SSC). Research indicated that fostering an environment in which learners feel supported and valued is influential to student persistence (Beadlescomb, 2019; Komarraju et al., 2010).

The School of Social Work at University B offers students the option of matriculating full or part time in one of four BSW program options. During Fall 2018, University B had 327 total BSW students enrolled. Students can enroll in the traditional program with courses completed on campus or at an off-campus located on the campus of a suburban community college. In addition, a hybrid program with both traditional and online courses is offered at another community college. The School of Social Work at University B has cultivated relationships with donors who establish endowed and other private scholarships for qualified BSW students in need of financial support. Students joining the university from a community college can transfer from 64 to 71 credit hours toward the 120 needed for a BSW degree.

The School of Social Work has a master of social work (MSW) prepared staff who provide academic advising and other support services. Social work students interested in volunteer activities can participate in any of the School's nine specialty student organizations, including the Association of Black Social Workers-Student Chapter, Coalition for Community

Social Work, Jewish Social Work Student Association, Mental Health Matters Association, Muslim Women Social Work Association, Phi Alpha Honor Society, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity in Social Work, and Student Organization (the umbrella social work group). These organizations can provide BSW students with opportunities for engagement and leadership beyond the classroom. Students who wish to continue their education at the graduate level with the university have access to a MSW degree program with Advanced Standing.

Purpose of the Current Study

The current study focuses on reasons students persisted with enrollment in their BSW program and if there were differences in BSW program experiences of African American and Caucasian students. The study explored a gap in the literature regarding racial differences in student perceptions of their BSW experiences and the influence it has on student decisions to persist. The research question explored in this study is as follows: to what extent are there differences in African American and Caucasian social work students' reasons for persisting with their BSW degree programs?

Methods

A quantitative, descriptive research design was used to provide information on the personal and academic factors that students perceived were important in selecting a BSW program and later persisting with their chosen program. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of both University A and University B.

Recruitment. All BSW students from University A were sent an email from the researcher asking them to complete an online survey regarding reasons for choosing their BSW program. The email explained the study and provided a link to the online survey. The first page of the survey was an information letter that explained the study. Because the survey was online, a

signature on the consent form was not required. A professor in the program also distributed paper copies of the survey to students who did not want to complete it online. Nine BSW students in University A program completed and submitted their surveys.

The researcher from University B had a graduate assistant distribute paper surveys to 80 students in the BSW program. The first page of the survey was the informed consent that had been approved by the IRBs of both universities. Because the return of the completed survey was evidence of their willingness to participate in the study, a signature was not required. Students completed the surveys and returned them to the graduate assistant.

Participants. The criteria for inclusion in this study were that students had to be enrolled in the BSW program at their universities and be either African American or Caucasian. Although 89 students from the two schools completed surveys, 9 were eliminated because they did not meet the racial criterion. Comparisons between the two schools were not possible due to the discrepancy in the number of participants from University A ($n = 8$) and University B ($n = 72$). The resultant sample included 28 (35%) African American students and 52 (65%) Caucasian students, with both African American and Caucasian students represented at each school.

The majority of students in the study were female ($n = 73$, 92.4%), including 27 (34.2%) African American and 52 (65.8%) Caucasian. One student did not provide their gender or race on the demographic survey. The mean age of African American students was 29.89 ($SD = 10.51$) with Caucasian students having a mean age of 27.33 ($SD = 9.65$). The age of the students ranged from 19 to 63. Most students ($n = 58$, 74.4%) reported their marital status as single, never married.

Seventy-five (93.8%) students were in their senior year. Sixty-two (77.5%) students had transferred from community colleges into their BSW programs. This number included 22

(35.5%) African American students and 40 (64.5%) Caucasian students. The mean number of credit hours transferred was 60.04 ($SD = 14.45$), with a range from 7 to 120 credit hours. (See Table 1.)

Instrument. The current study is based on an assessment instrument created by the researchers to acquire participant data (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status), personal characteristics (i.e., transfer from community college, number of credit hours transferred, enrollment status) and perceptions about their BSW program of choice. Information obtained from the survey provided some clarity on why students persisted with their BSW programs.

Thirty items on the survey were developed to measure perceptions of factors that could influence decisions regarding enrollment and persistence in BSW programs at the two universities. The items that were included in this section were taken from a review of literature on factors related to college enrollment and retention along with experiences of the researcher who had worked with admissions at her respective university. Students responded to the items on this section of the survey using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from not at all important (1) to very important (5). An additional 15 items on the survey were intended to measure factors that were related to attitudes of undergraduate students regarding their BSW programs. These items were developed from a review of related literature on persistence and retention in college programs. Each of the items on this scale were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Reliability of the items on the two scales were determined using Cronbach alpha coefficients. The obtained alpha coefficient for the persistence scale was .78, with an alpha coefficient of .70 obtained for the attitudes scale.

Data Analysis. The demographic data were analyzed using cross-tabulations, with chi-square tests for independence used to determine if African American and Caucasian BSW students differed in their demographic characteristics. The reasons for items on perceptions of program selection and persistence were compared using t-tests for independent samples. Because of the number of comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was used to determine the statistical significance of the individual analysis.

Findings

The first subscale compared reasons why students selected their programs between African American and Caucasian students. Three differences were found among the 14 items on this subscale, campus close to home, campus equipped *with contemporary technology*, and *availability of academic resources*. *Caucasian students* had more positive perceptions regarding university location close to home than African American students ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.36$; $t [78] = -2.30$, $p = .024$). In the comparison for campus equipped with contemporary technology, African American students ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .80$) had more positive perceptions than Caucasian students ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.06$; $t [77] = 2.75$, $p = .007$). Perceptions of availability of academic resources were higher for African American students ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .88$) than for Caucasian students ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.14$); $t [77] = 2.54$, $p = .013$). The remaining reasons for selecting their programs were not statistically significant.

The second subscale items were compared between African American and Caucasian students. The t-tests for independent samples did not provide evidence of statistically significant differences. The items that appeared to be least important was *being able to complete their BSW program online for African American* ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.38$) and *Caucasian* ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.44$) students. *BSW students should complete volunteer service* was not important for African

American ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.30$) or Caucasian ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.26$) students. In contrast, *being able to complete their BSW programs on time* was most important to both African American ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.09$) and Caucasian ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .83$) students. Both African American ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.04$) and Caucasian students ($M = 4.37$, $SD = .89$) indicated that *students should complete their BSW program prerequisites at community college* was rated as very important.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to explore factors that influenced students to persist with their BSW degree programs. Beadlescomb (2019) argued that “fostering an inclusive learning environment is critical for educators to . . . have an impact on students’ intent to persist” (p. 220). A secondary area of focus in this study was to determine if African American and Caucasian students differed substantially regarding reasons for selecting and then remaining with their respective BSW programs. Three main areas in the current study contributed new knowledge to understand why certain students persist in their BSW programs. The three main areas include first an understanding of how institutional attributes (i.e., proximity to home, affordable tuition, university made me feel wanted) could influence student persistence, secondly, how BSW program conveniences (i.e., accessibility to program advisors, course scheduling times were convenient, technology in BSW programs was up-to-date) contribute to their motivation to remain, and finally, how student satisfaction with BSW program experience (i.e., complete BSW program on time, approachable/friendly faculty/staff, BSW facilities were well maintained) could motivate students to stay. Participants in the current study were enrolled in BSW programs at one of two different universities located in the same urban city. One university is a small, private university with an emphasis on teaching, while the other a large, public, R1 ranked university.

According to student responses, financial considerations were important both in selecting and then persisting in their BSW programs. For example, reasons for selecting a program including affordable tuition, scholarships, and availability of financial aid were important for both African American and Caucasian students. In persisting, both student groups agreed that completing prerequisites at community colleges and being able to transfer more than half the credits needed for the BSW from community colleges were important. Research (de los Santos, Jr. & Sutton, 2012; Montague, 2012) indicated that being able to transfer credits from community colleges was helpful due to rising four-year college tuition costs. Some students enroll at their senior institution and a community college. Students rely on articulation agreements typically provided to them by the BSW academic advisor to ensure proper course selection, while paying a lower tuition rate at the community college.

For other students, institutional attributes (i.e., proximity to home, university made me feel wanted) were identified as very important and could be influential in their decisions to persist. Manthorpe et al. (2010) supported the contention, adding that proximity to home is an important attribute to many students making decisions about their social work education. Research indicates that BSW students who have positive, affirming relationships with faculty and who feel actively engaged in the classroom may be motivated to remain with their programs (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Other students may be motivated to remain with their BSW program if distance education, or online courses are available (DeMattos, 2019). Being able to observe and/or engage with culturally and ethnically diverse faculty role models with whom they identify can be a motivator for some students to persist with their social work program (Cross et al., 2013). Research indicated that students with broad, supportive networks of peers, faculty/

staff, family, friends, and others are more likely to persist to degree completion than those with limited or strained networks (Davis et al., 2019; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 2017a, b).

Implications

The current study has implications for BSW program faculty, administrators, and the broader social work community. Some students enrolled in BSW programs experience a multitude of challenges that could impact their ability to persist and successfully complete their education. The current study revealed that program academic reputation, affordability of tuition, proximity of program to home, availability of up-to-date technology on campus, and access to financial aid were important factors for both African American and Caucasian students. Student responses highlighted the importance of having conveniences, including BSW courses scheduled during times that best meet their needs, access to a BSW program academic advisor seven days a week, and being able to complete the BSW program entirely online. Understanding factors that could influence student persistence in BSW degree programs is important to sustaining the future of social work education and the broader profession.

Limitations

Limitations associated with the present study included self-reported data from participants that could be reflective of social desirability bias. According to Paulhus (1984), social desirability bias is to respond in a way that reflects what the researcher expects. This study is based on two urban institutions, one a large, research intensive institution and the other a small, private Jesuit university located in close proximity with similar student populations. The similarity of BSW students at both institutions could make study findings difficult to generalize to other BSW programs located in more culturally diverse communities. Race was the only demographic characteristic that was used to compare students in the two universities. Different

findings may have resulted by comparing additional demographics, including gender identity, sexual orientation, financial resources, family responsibilities, first generation college status, and employment status. To incorporate all of these characteristics, a large sample size from several universities and colleges would be required.

Future Considerations That Could Impact Students Persistence

Future research should consider using a larger sample of social work students at a variety of colleges and universities to determine if the findings would be similar. A longitudinal study should be used to follow social work students from orientation to graduation. Determining which factors were important to students in choosing a BSW program and establishing how influential those factors were in their decisions to persist requires additional study. Using a large sample of social work students from several universities could allow the examination of factors regarding student retention could include comparisons across demographic characteristics, including gender identity, sexual orientation, financial resources, family responsibilities, first generation college status, and employment status, as well as race. Additional research focused on persistence of BSW students of color could aid program recruiters with developing pre-admission and recruitment strategies. Engaging in focus group sessions with faculty and/or staff could help students assess BSW program fit, address their initial perceptions, and determine if the program potentially met their academic and social needs.

Conclusion

Findings from the current study underscore the importance of collecting research from currently enrolled BSW students and those who successfully persisted through to graduation. Capturing student feedback about factors that influenced their decisions to stay with their BSW programs could assist program administrators and faculty with developing programs, services,

and teaching strategies aimed at enhancing future student experiences and their overall levels of satisfaction. Knowing that African American and Caucasian students were generally in agreement on factors that were important in their decisions to persist provided support that programs were generally unbiased. Student responses indicated the types of services and support received on campus were consistent without regard to race or ethnicity. Program administrators with BSW and MSW programs on their campus could benefit from understanding why their students persisted to encourage continued education at the MSW level.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics: Demographic Characteristics by African American and Caucasian Students

Demographic Characteristics	Race/Ethnicity of Student				Total	
	African American		Caucasian			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	29.89	10.51	27.33	9.65	28.22	9.96
Credits Transferred	59.62	19.54	60.29	10.62	60.04	14.44
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
University						
A	3	10.7	5	9.6	28	35.0
B	25	89.3	47	90.4	52	65.0
Educational Level						
Sophomore	2	7.1	1	1.9	3	3.8
Junior	1	3.6	1	1.2	2	2.4
Senior	25	89.3	50	96.2	75	93.8
$\chi^2 (2) = 1.61, p = .447$						
Gender						
Male	4	14.8	2	3.8	6	7.6
Female	23	85.2	50	96.2	73	92.4
Missing 1						
$\chi^2 (1) = 3.05, p = .081$						
Marital Status						
Single, never married	24	85.7	34	68.0	58	74.4
Married	2	7.1	7	14.0	9	11.4
Separated	0	0.0	1	2.0	1	1.3
Divorced	1	3.6	7	14.0	8	10.3
Widowed	1	3.6	0	0.0	1	1.3
Other	0	0.0	1	2.0	1	1.3
Missing 2						
$\chi^2 (5) = 6.30, p = .278$						
Enrollment Status						
Full-time	27	96.4	52	100.0	79	98.8
Part-time	1	3.6	0	0.0	1	1.2
$\chi^2 (1) = 1.88, p = .170$						
Transfer from community college						
Yes	22	78.6	40	76.9	62	77.5

No $\chi^2 (1) = .03, p = .551$	6	21.4	12	23.1	18	22.5
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Table 2

t-Tests for Independent Samples: Reasons for Selecting Program (N = 80)

Reasons	<u>African American</u> (n = 29)		<u>Caucasian</u> (n = 52)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Access to admissions counselors	4.18	1.06	3.79	1.09	78	1.54	.127
The university made me feel wanted	4.07	.81	3.83	1.12	78	1.02	.310
Academic reputation	4.23	.82	4.33	.83	76	-.48	.630
Campus attractiveness	3.71	.98	3.50	1.09	78	.87	.389
Campus size	3.75	.84	3.27	1.19	78	1.89	.062
Affordable tuition	4.43	.96	4.33	.86	78	.49	.629
Campus close to home	4.00	1.36	4.50	.58	78	-2.30	.024
Campus close to work	3.46	1.48	3.35	1.41	77	.33	.742
Campus equipped with contemporary technology	4.41	.80	3.77	1.06	77	2.75	.007
Received scholarships	4.18	1.19	3.94	1.24	78	.82	.413
Availability of financial aid	4.43	1.03	4.50	.70	78	-.37	.715
Availability of collegiate athletics	1.78	.93	1.73	1.05	77	.20	.845
Availability of extracurricular activities	2.81	1.24	2.58	1.33	77	.77	.444
Availability of academic resources	4.37	.88	3.73	1.14	77	2.54	.013

Table 3

t-Tests for Independent Samples: Reasons for Persisting (N = 80)

Reasons	<u>African American</u> (n = 29)		<u>Caucasian</u> (n = 52)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Select current university BSW program again	3.82	1.22	4.06	1.10	77	-.88	.381
Perceptions about BSW program were accurate	3.50	1.14	3.51	1.15	77	-.04	.971
BSW program meets my scheduling needs	3.68	1.54	4.16	1.16	77	-1.56	.123
Meet with BSW advisor virtually	3.46	1.35	3.29	1.30	77	.55	.584
Able to complete BSW program on time	4.32	1.09	4.53	.83	77	-.95	.345
Complete my BSW program online	2.71	1.38	2.37	1.44	77	1.02	.310
Students should consider more than one BSW program	4.00	1.09	3.80	.85	77	.89	.378
BSW facilities are well maintained	3.50	1.37	3.65	1.09	77	-.52	.603
Technology in BSW program up-to-date	4.07	1.12	3.72	1.03	76	1.40	.166
Students should complete BSW prerequisites at community college	4.33	1.04	4.37	.89	76	-.17	.862
BSW students should complete volunteer service	2.75	1.30	2.92	1.26	77	-.57	.569
Have access to advising staff 7 days a week	4.25	.89	3.90	1.24	77	1.31	.193
Faculty and staff are approachable	4.04	.98	3.96	.85	76	.36	.721
Students should submit letters of reference for admission	3.57	1.23	3.73	1.22	77	-.54	.594
Students should be able to transfer more than half of credits needed from community college	4.32	1.02	4.27	.87	77	.22	.830