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# Preparing BSW Students for Practicum: Reducing Anxiety Through Bridge to Practicum Course

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## **Abstract**

A challenge for BSW programs is designing curriculum that both addresses students' anxiety prior to their field placements and prepares students to enter the field with the necessary values, skills, and knowledge. While the literature is rich in discussions of anxiety among graduate students, there is limited research on BSW students. Hence, this study examined the effectiveness of utilizing a Bridge to Practicum course in reducing anxiety of students entering the practicum. The study further identifies topic areas that help increase preparedness for practicum. Results indicated that core social work courses had prepared students to handle the rigor of the field placement. Although students may begin with preconceived notions (about the practicum site, their field instructor, and the work they are expected to perform), a major issue with anxiety was the fear of the unknown.

*Keywords:* preparedness, anxiety, bridge to practicum, BSW

Preparing students for competent and effective social work practice should be the goal of any accredited social work program (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008). Programs must continually assess their curriculum, making sure to incorporate various methods to evaluate all competencies. The challenge for these programs is staying up-to-date on the current trends in the social work field and infusing the content into the classroom (Liley, 2003). Thus, innovation is critical for staying abreast of the ubiquitous nature of the field.

Mackie and Anderson (2011) found students demonstrated more competence when their curriculum was embedded with competency based content. Skills learned and refined in the classroom setting lay the foundation for effective practice and prepare students for field education. They are designed to connect the theoretical and conceptual components of the classroom with actual practice settings (Fortune, Lee, & Cavazos, 2007). The ongoing challenge for BSW programs is designing curriculum which prepares its students to enter the field with the necessary values, skills, and knowledge in an ever-changing field. There is limited research on BSW students' anxiety and their perception of preparedness for field practicum and even fewer sources when trying to compare BSW and MSW students' experiences.

Anxiety prior to practicum placement is not unique to the field of social work (Eysenck, 1979; Rosenthal Gelman & Baum, 2010). Rosenthal Gelman and Baum (2010) found pre-placement anxiety centered on students' ambivalence of their skills set, practicum and clientele logistics, and their ability to manage school, practicum, and personal expectations. Maschi, Wells, Yoder Slater, MacMillan, and Ristow (2013) demonstrated that self-efficacy is an antecedent to a students' practice ability. Thus, it stands to reason that students who gain additional knowledge beyond the CSWE-driven core curriculum would feel more prepared and comfortable entering the practicum and feel less anxiety as a result.

Hence, this exploratory study focused on reducing anxiety by preparing BSW students to enter practicum for the first time. The course was designed to prepare students for entry into the field practicum with additional knowledge and skills to reduce students' apprehension about their next step in their applied learning: the practicum. While taking the *Bridge to Practicum* course, students explored field placement options and completed the field application and interview process before students who did not take the course. The objective of the course was to reduce students' anxiety while developing skills that would bridge them into the professional arena.

### **Literature Review**

Although research on pre-practicum anxiety is vast, the literature is predominantly focused on psychology graduate students (ex. Gloria & Constantine, 2000; Madson, Aten, & Leach, 2007a; Welsh, Stanley, & Wilmoth, 2004) and graduate students in medical fields (ex. Brunt et al., 2008; Lin, Chen, Li, & Lin, 2013; Tocco, et al., 2013). A cluster of studies took interest in teaching methods that addressed students' anxiety level prior to entering the internship or the application process, and were also aimed at perfecting curricular designs (Gockel & Burton, 2014) and reducing the student anxiety level (Ganzer & Zauderer, 2013).

The intent of some of these studies was to create better prepared and more confident students as potential competitors in the job market or for graduate school (Miller, 2014; Welsh et al., 2004). Several studies that examined pre-internship anxiety focused predominantly on graduate students' perspectives (Madson, Hasan, Williams-Nickelson, Kettman, & Van Sickle, 2007b). According to Bangen, VanderVeen, Veilleux, Kamen, and Klonoff (2010), a common characteristic of these studies is that they are qualitative rather than quantitative.

Given this research, it appears that scant attention is paid to other fields of study and to undergraduate students when discussing pre-practicum anxiety. This is surprising since many undergraduate disciplines—e.g., business, education, hospitality and tourism, music, political science, social work, sociology—include practicum as a required practice in their curriculum. The lack of attention given to anxiety in undergraduate students is alarming, given that studies of pre-practicum placement indicate that anxiety affects learning (Rosenthal Gelman & Lloyd, 2008; Sprengel & Job, 2004; Sun, 1999).

Sources of stress for students are both external and internal. For example, Jordan and Kelly (2011) focused on student interns' self-concept by studying their perception of themselves in terms of their self-confidence. Their study showed that self doubts (i.e., questioning their ability to maintain rapport with the clients, their perception of their own work ethic, and their view of their supervisor's perception of readiness for managing a case) seemed commonplace among those surveyed in their study. It should be noted that these findings do not suggest that students are inept; they merely indicate the fear that students have when putting their abilities and skills to the test. If this is the case, then the source of such stressors, as Jordan and Kelly (2011) have found, is the lack of self-confidence and the limited availability of skill-related experiences. Anxiety is particularly pronounced after students realize the potential serious consequences their actions in the field (Jordan & Kelly, 2011). Kaye and Fortune's (2004) study shows that the students' self-doubt is partly because of their preconceived notion about the intensity of the work environment, which can be remedied by an appropriate level of training and proper supervision. Such training and supervision are the purpose of the *Bridge to Practicum*.

Another variable that affects the anxiety level among pre-practicum students is their emotional stage (Maidment & Crisp, 2011). According to Maschi et al. (2013), a student intern who is ready to take on the field and is able to evaluate his or her own competence is emotionally ready, and is more likely to combat his/her anxiety if the roads are paved for a safe environment.

Externally, curricular designs and programs may overlook this issue. For example, Madson et al. (2007a) found that the majority of pre-practicum graduate students believed that although their graduate program prepared them for internship, it left out the specific intricacies of the work environment (e.g., CV development, interview preparation). However, the literature is silent on undergraduate students who may feel even less competent because of their limited experiences with the specifics of the labor market.

While program structure is an integral part of the preparation process, the literature also points to the importance of supervision (Kanno & Koeske, 2010) and the roles played by practicum supervisors and field instructors. The literature suggests that the symbiotic relationship between the student and the field instructor should extend beyond merely emulating those in the position of authority. Kaye and Fortune (2004) emphasize that this structure is strengthened in contents and in its delivery method only if there is clarity of the expectations in the field, that all actors (practicum advisor, student, and field supervisor) in the training process must be on the same page. Students must become aware of what is expected of them; field supervisors and the practicum advisors must also lay out their expectation of the process and outcomes of this experience. The correlation between performance in the field, curricular clarity, and expectations is particularly important because completing the practicum can be a harbinger for being recruited in the labor market (Lyter & Smith, 2004; Miller & Koerin, 2002).

Although improving program contents, preparedness, and/or the relationship with the supervisors may be effective strategies for reducing pre-practicum placement anxiety, the daily internship involvement may have its own specificities not predictable prior to the placement of the students. For example, previous studies (Bellini, Baime, & Shea, 2002; Godenick, Musham, Palesch, Hainer, & Michels, 1995; Kirsling, Kochar, & Chan, 1989) have indicated depressive symptoms among approximately 7% to 8.6% of the students during internship. Given this, the concern about student interns in regards to their abilities runs high in the literature, which must be dealt with by providing appropriate level of care or empathy needed in highly sensitive client-oriented work environments. However, the literature is not clear whether such depression or anxiety carry over beyond the internship years, or regressing to the baseline period. An issue that escapes most practicum or academic supervisors is their inattentiveness to, or an early detection of, the dormant pre-internship sub-threshold level depression or anxiety that surfaces during internship. For this reason, Hwang, Hahm, Kwon, Kim, and Lee (2008) have suggested early monitoring and management of this population during internship and the years beyond.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Given the exigent situation described in the above paragraphs, our aim is to explore ways of reducing students' anxiety level, and the concerns that our undergraduate BSW students show prior to their practicum placement. Social work students are not immune to this situation. Practicum is an integral part of the degree program in the field of social work (CSWE, 2008). While such training is a useful avenue for service learning and/or applied learning, social work educators must ascertain that obstacles for achieving competency are removed prior to launching placements. Hence, our hope in conducting this study was to shed some light on the specificities of the student preparedness, their anxiety, and the constructs that affect their perceived anxiety prior to practicum placement. We began this study with the question that while there is a symbiotic relationship between perceived preparedness and anxiety, does a student's perceived preparedness affect his or her pre-practicum anxiety? If so, then another pertinent research question is, How do programs ensure preparedness? We further envisioned that anxiety could be partially dependent on a student intern's perception of the work environment in regards to the type of relationship that they may foresee to have with their

field instructor. We hypothesized that participating in *Bridge to Practicum* enhances preparedness, which in turn reduces anxiety. Since the course is designed to expose students to what to expect from professional social workers (namely, field instructors), we further hypothesized that preparing students for a better relationship with the field instructor will also help reduce anxiety.

## Methodology

The main vision in this study rests on the effects of the *Bridge to Practicum* course. Our goal in this study was to shed some light on the specificities of student preparedness, anxiety, and the constructs that affect perceived anxiety prior to practicum placement. We began this study with the assumption that while there is a symbiotic relationship between perceived preparedness and anxiety, it is not clear if students perceived preparedness affects their pre-practicum anxiety. Our goal is to verify the necessity of including a method of training for preparing students in the BSW program. Following this, we propose to assess the effectiveness of the method introduced here in reducing the student anxiety about practicum. Thus, our aim is to compare the data generated from the pre-practicum experiences of the students who participated in *Bridge to Practicum*, with the post-practicum experiences of students in the same cohort that did not take the course.

### Bridge to Practicum

In the spring of 2012, a MSW graduate student surveyed BSW students on how prepared they felt entering practicum. The results brought to light a series of major concerns, which pointed to balancing personal-family life with practicum, preparedness for the field, and being involved with real cases. These findings suggested the fear students felt prior to entering practicum, which clustered around the lack of preparedness that could cause harm to clients. Although these findings showed that students felt their social work courses prepared them for the field, there were gaps surrounding some necessary information such as testifying in court, office/home visit safety, reporting abuse, self-care, vicarious trauma, and crisis management. Using these survey results as a baseline, a Selective Topics course: *Bridge to Practicum*, was developed and implemented to allow students the opportunity to obtain additional information (supplementing the CSWE required core courses) in the semester prior to entering field. Additionally, the course was designed to prepare students for entry into the field practicum. While taking the course, students explored field placement options, completed the field application and interview process (prior to their cohort) while developing skills that would bridge them into the professional arena.

Prior to the start of the field practicum, a Field Instructor Orientation was offered to all field instructors. As part of this training, attendees discussed the impact of the student/field instructor relationship in reducing or alleviating the anxiety of the student. Data found from this study is incorporated into future training curriculum.

The course, *Bridge to Practicum*, focused primarily on developing professional behaviors and practices that would assist the student in the practicum setting. Students were given additional opportunities to hone their professional identity while preparing for field. In order to allow students the opportunity to practice iden-

tifying as professional social workers and conduct themselves accordingly (EPAS 2.1.1), students used the practice behaviors 2.1.1.1-2.1.1.6. The course was designed with the following objectives in mind:

1. Explore various field placement opportunities and interview at prospective field agencies, selecting one for the practicum.
2. Complete field applications and interviews with prospective field instructors.
3. Develop a professional resume.
4. Explore professional use of self in a field placement setting.
5. Have opportunities to network with community professionals.
6. Demonstrate communication, interviewing, and assessment skills necessary for building effective helping relationships.
7. Evaluate students' expectations and concerns for their field practicum.
8. Explore, identify, and articulate any anxieties related to field practicum.

The course covered a variety of topics such as testifying in court, office/home safety, grant writing, managing burnout, compassion fatigue and personal self-care, techno-ethics, job interviewing skills and preparing for practicum basics. Using these topics, the course was designed to employ a variety of teaching methods (role plays, class discussion, readings and other applied learning activities in addition to utilizing frontline professionals as key experts in the various topics discussed) to strengthen the skill set of the students. By providing students with additional knowledge and tools, our objective was to decrease their anxiety about practicum. We intended to gauge this by conducting a post-practicum survey at the end of their practicum training. Thus, the main focus of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a newly designed and implemented course (*Bridge to Practicum*) in preparing students for practicum and measuring their anxiety level prior to their placement. We further hoped that enrolling in this course would help reduce anxiety about their practicum experiences. Hence, the course was offered in the Fall Semester prior to the students' placement in practicum; students were then placed in their assigned practicum sites in the following spring semester.

### Sample and Data

This exploratory study used a mixed methods approach utilizing questionnaires to elicit both quantitative and qualitative responses. After the initial IRB approval by the University's Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHSR), a pilot study was conducted in 2013 by utilizing a convenient sample of the students in *Bridge to Practicum* to determine if students felt prepared and had less anxiety as they entered the practicum following the completion of this course. This survey (the pilot study) brought to light the issues with anxiety and student success. We redesigned the course, adding in content areas identified by students such as resume building, grant writing, and abuse and neglect state regulation changes. The survey questions were also redesigned, in Fall 2014, based on the information gathered in 2013. The course instructor conducted the survey on a new student cohort (N = 16) who took *Bridge to Practicum* in Fall 2014. This cohort was also on schedule to enter the practicum the following semester (Spring 2015). The survey in Fall 2014 was conducted earlier in the semester. Our purpose for doing so was to also include in the course (*Bridge to Practicum*) items of interest to the students so that the course could address the issues that were

preoccupying the students' minds. To augment the findings, the course instructor conducted a post-survey on the students in Spring 2015 when they were close to completing their field experiences. Only the data from the Fall 2014 (pre-practicum test) and the Spring 2015 (post-practicum test) were included in this analysis.

The participants in this study all self-identified as females and were BSW majors in their senior year. Participation in practicum begins after completing more than 95% of the core curriculum in Social Work (57 credit hours) and their General Studies requirements (42-47 credit hours). Although BSW student training may vary (due to their interests in elective courses, double majoring, or selecting a minor) all students are required to complete 10 credit hours of practicum in social work. The age range of the sample varied from 20-60 years of age; however, a majority (80%) of the respondents were in the 20-25 year age range. Given the current age ratio among social work college students, the sample is representative of the theoretical population.

### **Variables and Measures**

We developed our own questionnaire with three additive scales that measured the variables specifically in this study: 1) preparedness; 2) anxiety; and, 3) relationship with practicum instructor. We also included demographic questions such as sex and age. The measuring instrument included a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire contained nine questions that measured students' expectations of their practicum experiences. We used the same instrument for the post-practicum survey with a twist in the verb that reflected past tense. For example, a pre-practicum measure of preparedness was stated as, "I feel prepared to begin my field practicum in January." The post-practicum survey of the same item read, "I felt prepared to begin my field practicum in January."

Three items measured preparedness that included the students' perception on their academic preparedness, their social work skills preparedness, and their overall preparedness for practicum. We included an additional question to the survey that gave the student participants the opportunity to list and explain the most effective classes that helped with their practicum experiences, "What classes best prepared you for practicum?" The pre-practicum survey also included two items that assessed "anxiety" felt by students before starting their practicum, and their "anxiety" about their inability to complete tasks that are expected of them during their practicum. Again, the verb tense was changed for these statements for the post-practicum survey in order to reflect the students' practicum experiences in retrospect. A set of three additional items also generated the data that measured the students' expectations and perceptions of their relationship with the field instructor, whether this relationship matters/mattered to the student intern, and the students' expectation of the field instructor's responsibilities. Except for the question that asked which courses prepared them for practicum, the nine quantitative statements in both pre- and post-practicum surveys employed a 5-point Likert scale as the set of the responses to measure the quantitative variables. The possible responses to the survey statements were: "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Disagree," to "Strongly Disagree." We then recoded the responses into three categories: "Disagree" (value of 1) through

“neutral” (value of 2) to “Agree” (value of 3). Statistics were calculated to show the overall patterns of difference between prior to the start of *Bridge to Practicum* and post practicum experiences.

Content validity was examined by receiving feedback from colleagues. As the first layer of analysis, we ran a test of reliability (Chronbach's  $\alpha > .70$ ) for each scale to ensure reliability. Chronbach's  $\alpha$  for “preparedness” was .75; it was .73 for “anxiety;” and, measured .82 for the items that measured the students' relationship with the field instructor.

### **Limitations**

Although data was collected for both groups of students (those who took *Bridge to Practicum* and those who did not), we did not compare the results for variations because of the small sample size ( $n=3$ ) of the cohort who did not take the course. We also recognize that the actual sample size for our pre- and post-practicum surveys is relatively small, which may hinder any generalization to the theoretical population.

### **Quantitative Data**

The second layer of analysis included a comparative assessment of the pre- and post-practicum responses. Although our intention was not to assess the importance of practicum in terms of service learning, the results in Table 1 are indicative of how practicum can stretch a person personally, intellectually, and professionally. However, and accordingly, the practicum experience may be envisioned differently prior to acquiring the service learning experiences. For example, the data in Table 1 indicates that many students (62.6%) expressed being anxious about completing a required task when surveyed prior to the start of their practicum. The post practicum survey results show that this number dropped to 57.9%.

The data in Table 1 also shows that there is a general lack of self-confidence among many students prior to their placement. Prior to placement, only 56.3% of students felt emotionally prepared and 68.8% felt they were academically prepared to begin their field practicum. Post-practicum assessment showed that these percentages increased to 79% and 89.5%, respectively. In addition, the pre-practicum surveys indicate that 75.1% agreed that they had solid social work background skills prior to the start of their practicum. This pool increased to 94.3% toward the completion of the practicum.

**Table 1**  
**The Effects of the Bridge to Practicum Course on Anxiety**

Variables	Prior To Taking <i>Bridge to Practicum</i>			After Taking <i>Bridge to Practicum</i>		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1. Emotional Preparedness	25.5%	18.8%	56.3%	10.5%	10.5%	79%
2. Academic Preparedness		31.3%	68.8%		10.5%	89.5%
3. Had Solid SWK Skills Prior to Practicum		25.0%	75.1%		5.3%	94.3%
4. Anxious About Practicum		12.5%	21.1%		87.6	78.9
5. Completing Tasks Anxiety	6.3%	31.3%	62.6%	31.6%	10.5%	57.9%
6. Personal/professional Stretch by Practicum		18.8%	75.0%	5.3%	10.5%	84.2%
7. Positive Relations with Practicum Instructor			100%	5.3%	10.5%	84.2%
8. Field Instructors Provide Feedback	18.8%	18.8%	62.6%	5.3%	15.8%	78.9%
9. Relationship w/Field Instructor Does Not Matter	43.8%	18.8%	37.5%	63.1%	15.8%	21.0%

**Qualitative Data**

Qualitative questions on the pre- and post-surveys allowed for information-rich data to be collected. We employed content analysis of the responses to open-ended questions in order to find out the prevailing general patterns in the responses of the students. Identifying themes was critical to the qualitative data analysis and to augment the quantitative analysis. We employed a process called “pawing” the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 88) that requires using the responses from each survey and reading (and rereading) them to highlight key phrases. As themes emerged and were identified, they were used to refine the coding process (Patton, 2002). For example, participants were asked what classes best prepared them for practicum. Those surveyed identified core social work courses such as Practice I (micro) and Practice II (Mezzo) and Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) as the courses equipping them to be successful in practicum. The special place for the Practice courses in the training process of the participants is evident in the justifications given by the students. For example, responses such as “*I think I will use these classes the most*” were commonplace among the students in the pre-practicum survey in Fall 2015. In addition, because of the applied learning nature of the Practice courses offered, students felt this course was most valuable: “*Practice classes because they have provided hands on experience and training*” (Fall 2015 Pretest participant). We also noticed that 80% of the Fall 2015 participants anticipated that Policy courses, beside Practice I and II, to be useful for practicum. These series of findings about other courses were not intended in this study, although one would expect that their contents would affect the students’ general educational training.

The post-practicum survey results for this same group showed a drop by fifty percent in the number of

students who felt the Practice courses will prepare them for the field experience. Post-practicum survey results also showed that although the core social work courses helped prepare students for practicum, *Bridge to Practicum* seemed to have been helpful because the course addressed the specific worries and concerns of the student. For example, one participant in the post-practicum survey expressed: “*I learned from all my social work classes but Bridge helped a lot.*” This type of expressed positive sentiment in regards to the effectiveness of a preparatory course, such as *Bridge to Practicum*, was expected because the course was designed to serve the purpose of preparing the student for the journey ahead of them. An overwhelming majority of students in our post-practicum survey stated that the *Bridge to Practicum* course was the primary course that helped with the nuances of practicum. As one participant explained: “*The Bridge class I took the semester previously showed me what was at stake before starting my training.*” Given these comments, we conclude that participants prior to their practicum placement felt core social work courses had prepared them to handle the rigor of the field placement. Likewise, when surveyed again following the practicum experience, participants recognized and found value in the *Bridge to Practicum* class, as well as in other courses such as Social Work Practice, in preparing them for practicum. At the end of this study, students felt prepared and felt that they had the skills they needed in order to successfully complete their practicum assignments.

However, we encountered another unintended issue (finding) in our study that points to the relationship between the student intern and her field instructor. With no exception, all participants in the pre-practicum survey envisioned a positive relationship with their instructors. However, this attitude shifted for many (approximately 15%) upon the completion of their practicum. This latter pool expressed dissatisfaction about their relationship with their field instructor. The shift in the attitude was partly because of the students’ cognition of the field instructors’ responsibilities; they assumed that it was the responsibility of the field instructor to provide feedback and guide them through the real casework situations. This is curious since the literature places great emphasis on the importance of the relationship with field instructors.

However, our post practicum survey also showed a difference in student perception of their relationship with field instructors. Prior to the start of the practicum, 43.8% of the students disagreed with the idea that their relationship with their field instructor did not matter as long as they were learning. This increased to 63.1% (an increase of 19.3%) in the post-practicum survey. This means that after the practicum experience, many more students reported that the quality and nature of their relationship with their field instructor made a difference in their learning.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Internship anxiety has been a long-standing issue in academia. Some have viewed it more seriously; others might have treated it as a cursory issue. Our study showed that there are many issues relating to internship, field experiences, and/or practicum preparation that make the concern with pre-practicum anxiety a genuine one, which must occupy a special place among practitioners. Our review of the literature showed that anxiety must be viewed as an utmost important issue because a student intern’s anxiety determines intern-

ship outcomes and career commitment (Wang, Chiang, & Lee, 2014). People are more likely to be fearful in an environment that is unknown to them, the relevant example here is the practicum. Thus, worry triggers worry, especially for individuals facing a *mélange* of stimuli in an unfamiliar environment (Reinecke, Becker, Hoyer, & Rinck, 2010).

Although our intention in this research was not to compare BSW and MSW students, in line with the MSW literature, we focused on common threads such as preparedness (Rosenthal Gelman & Baum, 2010; Bangen et al., 2010) and relationships with field instructors (Kanno & Koeske, 2010). Our research showed that these factors to be common sources of anxiety among undergraduate social work students as well.

Our literature review further reflected that the concern with anxiety and preparedness is widespread in different disciplines at different academic levels that require practicum as part of the curriculum. However, little attention is paid to undergraduate students—especially undergraduate social work students. The preponderance of research reviewed here sought to determine the causes of anxiety prior to entering practicum, and the importance of field practicum, but very few paid attention to whether certain training programs in their discipline help reduce anxiety in their students prior to their practicum placement

It is also evident from our review that while the field education component is critical to any BSW curriculum, as it serves to connect the theoretical and conceptual components of the classroom with actual real practice settings (CSWE, 2008), programs may not be placing enough emphasis on training and preparing students for internship. While CSWE charges each accredited program to design field education as its signature pedagogy, it provides the programs freedom in how this is actualized (CSWE, 2008). However, it is evident from our review that programs (especially undergraduate programs) are not placing emphasis on training and preparing the students for internship anxiety. The burden of remedying anxiety is not solely a responsibility to be expected of the field instructor or the practicum supervisor; internship-related information should be conveyed to the students earlier in the process via a training curriculum with the intention of increasing preparedness and reducing anxiety among interns. Therefore, we would emphasize the necessity of placing in the curriculum an introductory course that acquaints the students with the nuances of internship. This recommendation reflects both the literature and the findings in this study that preparedness is a key factor in dealing with anxiety. Such a course can (prior to the practicum) bring to light and modify the student's (preconceived) notions about the practicum site, their field instructor, and the work they are expected to perform.

Our speculation was correct that one anxiety producing stressor for undergraduate pre-practicum students is a lack of awareness of their abilities to meet the challenges of the work environment. We suggest that this awareness can be increased if students are given opportunities to practice their skills. Students need to practice skills in order to realize that they can do the work. It is also conceivable that students may enter the field with certain expectations about their field instructors, but the person may not measure up to their expectations. Field instructors who conservatively approach this point or lack confidence in students may

exacerbate the issue. Nonetheless, the reasons for this gap need to be explored further since developing positive relationships or rapport with one's field instructor is vital in successful completion of practicum.

The comparison between the pre- and post-practicum results in this study points to the effectiveness of remedial training (for example, *Bridge to Practicum*). One outcome of this that we have accidentally stumbled on was that students enrolled in *Bridge to Practicum* were often curious about the professionals' practicum experiences, from the perspective of student and field instructor. Front line professionals were utilized that helped us with key topics in this study. Many of them were our program alumni and have had field instruction experiences. Utilizing these professionals gave credence to our initial hunch about student anxiety. We suggest adding a segment to the in-class component of *Bridge to Practicum* that includes a panel discussion of current and former practicum students and field instructors. We believe that the anecdotal evidence of the fear that students expressed in not doing well and/or causing harm while in practicum will be alleviated by hearing the experiences of those who have "been there" and survived—thus, lending itself to future research.

Finally, soliciting students' opinions on the type of coverage in *Bridge to Practicum*, perhaps, helps in understanding and detecting what students want. For example, one change made from the previous cohort that resulted from this exercise was the addition of loan forgiveness and corrective thinking information. Although two very different topics, each held weight for pre-practicum students both personally and professionally. This is a backdoor approach to understanding the hidden aspects in how a student perceives his or her shortfalls with regards to the expectations of the discipline. Further research can test the relationship between preparedness and anxiety and these topics. One related issue here is the lack of opportunity for students to express exactly what they see as the cause(s) of anxiety once identified in the practicum, which would also help the course (*Bridge to Practicum*) to address those issues in the class. Future research may not dismiss this point cursorily.

Given the above, we would like to reiterate that there is no one shopping list that classifies all types of stressors prior to placement decisions or going through the application process for internship. Placement in social work is a valuable experience in an abstract world with real boundaries; a world dubbed by Doel (2010) as the "Socialworkland." This is not a fantasy word; it is a world in creation for social work interns. The components of this world affect the well-being of the student intern. If viewed cursorily by mentors, educators, and supervisors, it creates anxiety for many (graduate or undergraduate) students who are not prepared to confront it in their journey through this experience.

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