



Exploring International Internships in Social Work Education

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Abstract:

This study discusses the results of a survey completed by 228 accredited social work programs describing their international field placement opportunities. Responses were aggregated to identify the number and frequency of international placements, the countries where placements occurred, the model used to develop international placements, and the supervision and monitoring of international placements. The benefits and challenges to offering international social work placements are identified, and sustainable resources for promoting the development of international placements are discussed. The information is intended to aid in the future development of international field placements and to encourage collaborative efforts to increase access to such placements.

Social work professionals increasingly find themselves working with diverse client systems, which require advanced levels of multicultural awareness. International field experiences are one avenue for gaining knowledge of cultures, yet only a small number of students are able to participate in these placements during their social work education. The purpose of this study was to examine which social work programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) offer international field placements, and to determine best practices for developing international placements. The study offers a current overview of the field practicum models being used, the efficacy of these models, and the barriers encountered with these models. Benefits and challenges to offering international social work placements are also discussed, in hopes that this information will aid in the development of more international field placements for social work students and encourage collaborative efforts as a means to increase access to such placements.

Literature Review

Overview of International Opportunities

In the United States, social work programs must prepare students to work in a nation distinguished by its cultural diversity. Multicultural education teaches students to understand and value cultural differences (Cole, 1984). Personal values affect how students view and appear to clients, and how

one interacts with clients (Cole, 1984; Lindsey, 2005). Research has shown that being self-aware has a positive effect on the development of professional values (Royse & Riffe, 1999). Practicing social work in other countries gives students the opportunity to observe the reality of politics in the host countries, and to develop a deeper understanding of international and national policies (Ahmadi, 2003).

Impact on Student Learning

In a qualitative study with Scottish and American social work students, participants reported that international experience broadened their perspective and encouraged them to consider different viewpoints. Students acknowledged cultural differences and the need for more culturally sensitive practices, and students became more aware of challenges to these values and to societal beliefs (Evanson & Zust, 2006).

In a study completed in 2005, Lindsey concluded that social work students who had previously interned abroad developed a deeper commitment to the social work profession, as well as a lifelong global perspective (Lindsey, 2005). Learning how to identify needs in other cultures increased students' awareness of societal needs within their own culture. The experience of being "the other" gave students the chance to understand the struggles involved with being from a different culture and trying to assimilate into American society. This experience led to a deepened sense of empathy and respect for those different from themselves (Gilin & Young, 2009).

Prior Research on International Placements

In 1992, Johnson (1996) surveyed 376 CSWE-accredited social work programs. This survey focused solely on international opportunities for baccalaureate students, and was administered to program field directors. Johnson found that 33% (55 of 167) of respondents had placed students internationally for field education. Most arrangements involved a limited number of students. Johnson also found that 12% of programs administer a travel or exchange program not related to fieldwork. The majority of the above programs (49%) were facilitated using a program sponsored by another unit of the college, such as a university's study abroad office. Roughly 16% of programs reported students traveling with another institution, such as an outside volunteer agency (Johnson, 1996). Johnson's research confirms that there is an interest in international social work within programs.

Panos, Pettys, Cox, and Jones-Hart (2004) surveyed all CSWE-accredited social work programs (n=446). With a 100% response rate, 21.1% (94 of 446) of programs reported having placed students internationally between 1997-2002. The authors also found an increase in programs committing to developing long-term international placement options, as compared to previous studies (Panos et al., 2004).

Models of International Field Placements

Structure of Placement Hours

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that there were two options for completing field hours offered by social work programs that provided international placements. The most common model was a block placement. Students complete hours over the course of several weeks, after completing their required academic work. Students were placed full-time in an agency (30 to 40 hours weekly) to complete the required number of hours.

The second option was a concurrent placement. In a concurrent placement, students complete both course work and their field placement throughout the academic year. Some programs with a concurrent schedule also allow students to complete a block placement over summer (Theriot, Johnson, Mulvaney, and Kretzschmar, 2006). The individual social work program's curriculum framework typically dictated the type of placement offered (Lager, Leta, & Rodgers, 2007).

Placement Partnership Models

Pettys, Panos, Cox, and Oosthuyen (2005) surveyed 53 social work programs that had offered international field placements in the past; twenty-one of the programs were still placing students abroad at the time of the survey. The authors summarized the four primary models of field placements used, including the one-time/independent placement model, the neighboring country model, the on-site model, and the exchange/reciprocal model (Pettys, Panos, Cox, & Oosthuyen, 2005).

Methodology

Design of the Investigation

This exploratory study identified CSWE-accredited social work programs that offer international practicum opportunities to their students and the field model used by these programs. The research design was similar to a study completed in 2005 by Panos, Pettys, Cox, and Oosthuysen, which outlined programs that offered international opportunities between the years of 1997-2002 (Pettys et al., 2005). This study determined which programs are currently offering international placements, the structure of these placements, and the benefits and challenges of offering international placements.

A qualitative and quantitative survey was used to collect information from social work program field directors. Data was collected through a survey administered by the online tool, Survey Monkey. The survey included both multiple-choice questions and text boxes for open-ended qualitative questions. Respondents had the opportunity to freely express their opinions and to add more information through the qualitative questions.

Target Population

Currently, there are 518 CSWE-accredited programs (CSWE, 2012); our survey was sent to 482 of these programs. This study specifically looked at programs located within the United States; seven

programs were disqualified because of location. The remaining 29 programs could not be reached to identify a contact. This survey did not employ a specific sampling strategy; rather, the target population included all social work program field directors. For schools without an identified field director, the program director was invited to participate. Only one respondent was allowed to respond from each social work program. This sampling approach was used in order to obtain the most comprehensive information.

Data Collection and Analysis

Survey Monkey organized the quantitative data in the form of pie charts and bar graphs. Qualitative data was already in written format, and was organized using both Dedoose and Survey Monkey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the information gathered, and thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data. Patterns were observed and then sorted into categories where frequency was recorded; themes were then developed from the various categories. Common themes that emerged through the qualitative analysis were compiled with the quantitative findings.

Limitations of the Study

This study used exploratory design with a mixed method approach to study international field placements. The data cannot be generalized to all social work programs in the United States, as it is unknown whether the unrepresented programs offer international opportunities to their students. The breadth and depth of the study was feasible through the use of a mixed method approach; however, some questions that could have affected breadth and depth were skipped or unanswered by some participants. This study is not meant to be a comprehensive description of all international opportunities.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The survey had a response rate of 47%; a total of 228 programs responded to the survey. Only one individual was allowed to complete the survey from each program to ensure there were no duplicate responses. Surveys were linked to individual e-mails, so the survey could not be forwarded, and respondents were not obligated to answer every question. The only required question was whether or not the program offered international placements.

Of the 228 respondents, 51 reported offering international field placements. Twenty-two programs placed only undergraduate students, 14 programs placed only graduate level students, 12 programs placed both undergraduate and graduate level students, and three programs left this question blank. Students completed anywhere from 200 hours to 700 hours in international field placements, and the majority of programs had been placing students for less than 10 years. Seven programs had been placing students for over 10 years, with one program placing students for over 20 years. [Table 1](#) displays placement location and the number of programs placing social work students in each

country.

Structural Models Used to Develop International Field Placements

Social work field programs typically offer either a concurrent or block field placement. Students who complete a concurrent placement work for a required number of hours dispersed over two semesters; students who complete a block placement work for a required number of hours in a single semester. For international placements, 37 programs (79%) offered block field placements while only 10 programs (21%) offered concurrent field placements. Of these programs, 19 programs (40%) offered international placements over the summer. Sixteen programs (84%) offered summer block placements while three programs (16%) offered summer concurrent placements.

Block Placements

Advantages. The advantages of block placements include flexibility, a fit with the current program model, full immersion within the agency, and reduced expenses due to less time required living abroad. Block placements were offered in the fall, spring, and summer. 85.7% of programs reported using block placements, with students completing hours over the course of one semester or during a summer. Three programs reported having students complete courses while in placement. These programs required students complete a field seminar course while in placement; courses were completed online using technology such as Horizon Live (Wimba) or Skype.

Flexibility & Current Program Model. The block placement model requires students to complete coursework prior to starting the placement, which enables students to focus solely on their field assignments. During block placements, students are placed in the agency full-time. This immersion decreased the amount of time required to socialize the student to the professional social work role, and allowed students to complete the CSWE required hours within one semester. One respondent who stated, "Block placements allow students to have an intensive experience that is just long enough to fully experience/appreciate the culture," exemplified this.

Social work programs offering international block placements indicated that the block placement fit with their current program model. With all students completing block placements, coordination of international placements was simplified. Programs using a concurrent placement model offered block placements in the summer so as to not disrupt the students' academic year.

Full Immersion & Cost. Block placements allowed students to become fully immersed within the agency. This was confirmed by one survey respondent:

Agencies and students benefit because students are immersed in the agency. When they start a client contact, make a phone call or need to be there when a case is being discussed—they are present to receive a returned call, or advise. Agencies are apprecia-

tive. Students feel very prepared and agencies agree since the students have had their practice courses, which include practical experience leading groups, macro projects and simulated client interaction.

Block placements were also reported to be less costly compared to concurrent placements, because they are limited to one semester. Students spent less time in the host country, as two full semesters were viewed as too expensive for the student and for the program. The block placement allowed for a concentrated focus in the host country in order for the student to complete the CSWE required hours in just one semester.

Disadvantages. The most prevalent theme that emerged regarding the disadvantages of block placements was time constraints. Eight respondents relayed that one semester is not enough time for students to develop an understanding of their host culture. Survey respondents reported the block placement time frame elapses “too quickly.” Eight respondents in the qualitative data echoed this theme; one respondent feared that the “experiences may lack depth.” This concern was described by the following respondent: “Being in another culture is a learning experience in itself, so trying to learn all that one would learn in their own country, plus all the cultural nuances in one semester, is a challenge.”

Although students may express interest in a yearlong placement, programs with block placements reported that a longer placement would not coordinate with the structure of their program. Two respondents said that having extended stays in the host country would be beneficial. According to one respondent, the ideal placement is “about six months on-site with wrap-around curriculum.”

Concurrent Placements

Advantages. Although few programs used a concurrent schedule when placing students abroad, seven respondents discussed the advantages of using a concurrent schedule. A concurrent schedule provides the student with a greater connection to campus through online courses and frequent contact with professors. One respondent relayed that U.S.-based students who were enrolled in an online course with a student working internationally benefited from the experiences being shared by the student. Additional support from campus benefited both the student and the agency. Students were able to spend two full semesters in the host country and agency, which deepened their knowledge of the culture and customs of the host population. The extended length of time allowed for an extended orientation and more preparation time as well.

Disadvantages. Similar to block placements, time management was also identified as a disadvantage to concurrent placements. Respondents considered two semesters too lengthy; students needed additional support and advising to complete two full semesters. Three programs identified extended time away from the cohort and other students as a disadvantage as well.

In certain host countries, the Internet was reportedly unreliable and at times did not work. In addition to Internet service challenges, time differences between the host country and the home university also resulted in difficulty participating in online courses. Online courses using software such as Horizon Live (Wimba) and requiring synchronous course components were reported to be offered at inconvenient times for students studying abroad. Lastly, seven programs with a concurrent model were unable to offer international placements because they were not able to coordinate required coursework with the international placement. In regard to concurrent international placements, one survey respondent stated, "There is no way that students could complete their required courses with a concurrent model – unless they delayed graduation."

International Placement Partnership Models

Results of this study indicate that placements are facilitated using a variety of models. Respondents reported partnering with international universities, placing students in a neighboring country, and using a tertiary agency. The analysis of the data collected suggested programs are using three of the four models identified by Pettys, Panos, Cox, and Oosthuyen (2005). No programs reported using an on-site model, where an on-site adjunct faculty member supervised the international placement.

Independent/One-Time Placement Model

Fourteen programs that were unable to develop continuing international placements used the one-time placement model instead. This most commonly occurred in smaller programs where only a small number of students were likely to express interest; placements were arranged when a student requested an international practicum. To arrange these placements, social work programs used tertiary agencies, partnered with international agencies, or utilized international universities.

Neighboring Country Model

Ten programs used a neighboring country model, placing students in either Canada or Mexico. One program noted that it is currently not placing students in Mexico, due to a travel advisory. The analysis of data collected indicated programs using a neighboring country model had been placing students longer than programs that place in other international locations. Two programs had been placing students for over 12 years, and three programs had been placing students for 8 to 10 years.

Qualitative analysis indicated the neighboring country model allowed for more student participation, with three of the programs having over six students placed. Six programs offered a concurrent schedule; these programs reported having students take courses on campus while placed internationally. Programs using the neighboring country model reported a higher interest among their students (66.7%) than the interest level reported for all survey participants (51.6%).

Exchange/Reciprocal Model

Twenty-seven programs utilized the exchange/reciprocal model, making this the most popular model used. Seventy percent (n=19) of the exchanges were arranged through a “faculty to agency” relationship, with 37% (n=10) of programs using a “university-to-university” model. Eighty-nine percent (n=24) of these programs reported placing students annually. Nine respondents (33.3%) reported that their program placed three to five students annually.

Ten programs reported using a university-to-university model, and of these programs, seven provided reciprocal exchanges. However, respondents reported that students from the host university rarely participated in the exchange; it was mainly financial difficulties that prohibited international students from participating in the exchange. When developing long-term placement relationships, participants identified the relationship and mutual collaboration as key. One respondent wrote, “Personal connections with agencies abroad is one of the key factors.”

Benefits and Challenges with International Placements Benefits

Common themes that emerged when describing the benefit of international placements were increased interest in global social work, expanded opportunities for students, and exposure to diverse cultures.

Increased interest in global social work. Qualitative data suggested that completing an international practicum prepared students to do international social work, as students gained a global perspective for social work both in the U.S. and abroad. Respondents viewed international placements as “mind-opening.” According to one respondent, international placements “expose students to different cultures and the ways social work is performed throughout the world.” Eighteen respondents noted that completing a field practicum abroad expands students’ abilities to think and to practice globally. After completing an international field placement, students expressed interest in international issues and were more aware of global policies and practices. Thirteen programs believed that students gained a “global perspective” and that international placements offered students hands-on experience. According to one respondent, “International field placements expose students to different cultures and allow them to consider how they may begin to practice within diverse cultures as opposed to simply reading about these cultures in a textbook.”

Four respondents believed offering international field practicum placements provided students with an experience they would not be able to get locally. An international placement “gives students a broader perspective and brings an interest in international issues to all students.” Thirteen respondents stated that for students who expressed interest in international social work, this opportunity gave them experience in their preferred area of practice. One respondent stated, “Students have a better understanding of social work practice in a global society, they have a better understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.”

Expanded opportunities for students. Thirteen respondents reported that international placements expanded the opportunities for social work students. Respondents noted that the experience expanded the student's knowledge outside his or her own culture, to include international comparative policy and practice issues. Students experience what it's like to be a minority, and gain a better understanding of the struggles experienced by minorities. Struggles included language difficulties and cultural differences, such as food, religion, housing, and transportation. One respondent noted that an international practicum provided students with a diverse learning experience, which expanded the students' understanding of cultural differences.

Two respondents reported that for international students who complete international placements in their home country, the experience may lead to employment once the student graduates. In addition, six programs stated that for students interested in pursuing a career in international social work, the experience might lead to future employment opportunities in the field. Students also had the opportunity to network and meet other social workers from their host country. This contact was beneficial to the student as well as the social work program, which learned from these practitioners and infused new material into the curriculum. Reportedly, these relationships assisted in broadening the international program.

Exposure to diverse cultures. Twenty-one respondents said that the international placement exposed students to diverse cultures, and to the international service delivery system. Students developed a greater appreciation and a deeper understanding of different cultures. Social work is not performed the same way throughout the world, and experiencing the various roles of a social worker allowed the student to become a well-rounded practitioner. Nineteen respondents emphasized the impact that an international placement had on a student's understanding of diversity; cultural immersion can lead to a deeper sense of cultural acceptance and competency, or "intercultural competence." According to one respondent, "There appears to be more personal growth in students who do international placements, they develop stronger critical thinking skills, students come back changed individuals."

Challenges

The two main challenges with offering international field placements seem to be cost and supervision. Other challenges identified include cultural differences, communication issues, and the lack of resources, safety, reliable Internet access, and the preparedness of students.

Cost and supervision. Respondents discussed how international placements might pose a financial strain to both the student and the program. Two respondents indicated that at times the faculty member arranging the placement had to complete extra work, because time was not allotted within the program budget. As mentioned previously, the majority of programs were unable to offer financial support to their students, and with few scholarship opportunities, students had to finance

their own placement. Completing an international placement, therefore, was not an option for many students. Two respondents related that while students are interested in participating in international placements, the high cost and time demands act as disincentives.

According to 11 respondents, the distance between the international placement and the home university make it difficult for the social work program to ensure that supervision meets CSWE standards. Many international agencies do not have MSW staff members. The current CSWE policy statement states that for “cases in which a field instructor does not hold a CSWE-accredited social work degree, the program assumes responsibility for reinforcing a social work perspective and describes how this is accomplished” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). Additionally, it was difficult for programs to ensure that students received the same level of experience they would in a local placement. One concern included, “The field placement must meet all requirements for a skill-building field placement. It is not to be confused with a study travel seminar,” while one respondent indicated, “I’m not sure that international field placements teach students the skills they need. Too often the student is just interested in the travel and not the development of skills.”

Barriers. For 12 programs, it was difficult both to convey educational expectations and to monitor the placement from a distance. Eleven programs said that international agencies might also have different role obligations, making it difficult for the agency to fulfill the requirements. The supervisor may have different responsibilities that do not align with CSWE expectations. Three programs noted that staff shortages and a lack of resources within an international agency led to inadequate supervision. Reliable access to Internet also presented challenges for remote supervision. A perceived lack of structure within some international agencies also became problematic to both the student and the social work program. One respondent reported, “The lack of structure and differences in concepts of time often frustrates students.” Three programs identified safety as a concern as well.

Fifteen programs experienced difficulty related to language, and noted that language barriers between the host agency, the field director, and the student can lead to miscommunication. One respondent relayed, “One student participated in a test program but found her foreign language skills (Spanish) inadequate.” Thirty-nine percent of programs reportedly solved communication issues by requiring students to have prior knowledge of the language of the host country. Some programs promoted offering language classes either before the placement occurred or during the placement; one example in the literature reported offering students daily four-hour intensive language classes before the exchange occurred and during the exchange (Carrilio & Mathiesen, 2006).

Best Practices for the Development of International Placements

Occasional or One-Time Placement Model

Programs that have small numbers of students interested in international placements each year may consider several options. Due to time demands and the complexity in planning international

placements, programs considering a one-time placement model would more likely benefit from working with a tertiary agency that can broker the exchange. Respondents reported using agencies such as Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), 123 International, and Best Semester to arrange international exchanges. Although the cost is higher, these programs include housing, transportation to and from the airport, and in some cases, in-country transportation, food, and laundry facilities. Because field instructors are not required to have an MSW, programs are able to be flexible when arranging these placements. According to Alexandria Raab of CCS, students are provided with a supervisor. It was reported that the majority of CCS supervisors hold masters' degrees (personal communication, July 8, 2011). With additional support, these field instructors are able to supervise social work students.

A second option for social work programs that have a small number of student participants would be to partner with other departments within the university; this option would open up exchanges to other university students. One university implemented international placements by using a developmental model for international exchanges. The program began with seven students from various programs, including Latin American Studies, International Business, and Anthropology; the social work program arranged an exchange where the students visited La Paz, Mexico. Students participated in Spanish classes and went on excursions in order to gain a better understanding of Mexican culture. The next year, the program placed more emphasis on identifying social issues and social concerns, with 17 students participating. The international program developed from these experiences (Carrilio & Mathiesen, 2006).

Collaborating with a university's internal Study Abroad office may also provide opportunities to place students internationally. Many study abroad programs have advisors and directors employed internationally that may have contact with social service agencies, and would be able to help facilitate a placement site. Summer study abroad programs may be able to accommodate a block placement, with a student returning in the fall to complete the social work curriculum.

Finally, a third option for programs that may not have consistent student demand or department resources to warrant developing continuing exchanges is to partner with other universities who are also interested in developing international field placements. One respondent developed the school's international program through a consortium grant linking universities in three countries. Members of the International Association of Schools of Social Work were able to apply for a \$4,000 grant to assist with project funding. For programs desiring to partner with different social work programs, this can help alleviate some of the expenses (IASWW, 2011).

There are a number of examples in the literature of consortia developed to address various educational needs. The consorial approach is often taken in an effort to address a shortage of resources, and it has been suggested that consortia can help increase access and influence program development (Bailey & McNalley Koney, 1995). Social work programs with limited resources and/or student

demand for international placements may want to consider contacting other schools of social work and/or international organizations to assess interest in collaborating on the development of an international consortium. One faculty member may have a relationship with a professional colleague that is willing to provide supervision, while a faculty member at another school may have a connection with an international agency that is interested in hosting students. The opportunities for collaboration are limited only by a lack of coordination of resources. Bailey and McNalley Koney offer a framework for developing a consortium, and they identify elements that contribute to the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of the process. This framework may be helpful for programs considering the development of a consortium. Field education has a long history of collaborative efforts between service organizations and universities to provide quality field education (Bogo & Globerman, 1999). Consequently, a consortium to provide international field placements would likely be a natural fit to address this educational goal.

Long-Term Sustainable Placements

Developing a long-term, sustainable international placement takes time and planning. Without sufficient planning, programs run the risk of an unsuccessful placement. There are core elements that appear in the literature, and were affirmed by this study, that enhance a successful international placement. These elements include communication with an emphasis on clear expectations of purpose, goals, and roles for all participants, importance of program structure and fit with international placements, supervision, and orientation. Each of these elements requires detailed information-gathering.

Communication

When developing an international placement, it is important to be aware of university policies pertaining to international education. Involving university officials and faculty members in the planning process is a critical first step to gaining support for international placements. Educating faculty members about the international program will increase the likelihood that they will promote the program to students, and may lead prospective faculty to consider supervising a student abroad when participating in their own international opportunities.

Options for developing international placements are endless; however, most programs reported partnering with an international agency. Students were placed with the same agencies annually, and programs reported that developing relationships with the same agency helped to ease the placement process. The importance of building mutually beneficial relationships with international agency staff is critical to the sustainability of an international placement. Programs considering developing an international placement may want to consider approaching agencies that have already supervised social work students.

Clearly defining the roles that each participant will have, and the expectations of the respective

partners, has been a critical element to successful placements. Identifying methods and frequency of communication, and the role each participant would have with regards to orientation, learning objectives, supervision and evaluation surfaced as important details in planning an international placement.

Program Structure

Programs with international placements have identified the block schedule as more convenient for both the program and the student. Block placements can occur during the spring, fall, or summer sessions. For programs that are unable to provide block placements, a concurrent schedule may be beneficial. Students can enroll in online classes while participating in an international placement. To aid in online classes, respondents identified the following software: Macromedia Breeze, Illuminate Live, Horizon Live (Wimba), Skype, and Interactive Video Networks (INV). Other virtual classroom systems include Interwise, LearnLinc, Lotus Learning Space, Webex, and Placeware (Schullo, 2006).

Supervision

In order to sustain an international placement, the program must identify a supervisor/field instructor. One-half of the responding programs required supervisors to have earned an MSW. Survey results indicated that programs that do not require supervisors to have an MSW must work closely with the agency to ensure that CSWE requirements are met. If the potential supervisor does not have an MSW, it is the program's responsibility to integrate social work values throughout the duration of the placement ([Table 2](#)).

It is recommended that the program provide an orientation to potential supervisors, or when possible, trains supervisors in person. Programs should provide supervisors and staff with field manuals. The program should send administration or faculty to the placement site to do field visits in person every two to three years, and all requirements should be discussed with potential supervisors prior to arranging the international placement. Programs also used Horizon Live (Wimba) and the telephone to provide additional supervision.

Orientation

Twenty-nine responding programs (83%) offered an orientation to the student. Sixty-eight percent (n=19) of these orientations were offered in the home country, and 28.6% (n=8) reported offering the orientation in the host country. The qualitative data revealed that four programs (15.4%) provided orientation before the student embarked and upon arrival in the host country. Thirteen respondents (50%) related that the social work program provided the orientation. In seven programs (26.9%), the orientation was provided by the host agency, and in two programs (7.7%), the host university provided the orientation.

The qualitative data revealed that the orientations provided information on what to bring to the

host country, money exchange, medical coverage, and phone and Internet services. Respondents reported hosting question-and-answer sessions prior to placements, and one respondent discussed having this be part of the orientation. Four respondents reported covering culture during the orientation, including language and country-specific customs. One respondent related that their program also discussed places to avoid, safe locations within the host country, and communication protocols. Programs also covered current problems within the host country and travel advisories. Additionally, one respondent discussed visa extensions during the orientation. According to one respondent, an orientation “is probably one of the most important factors in a successful international placement.” Qualitative data revealed that language was a strong component of several orientations, stating “Students are expected to be able to speak the language of the country before beginning their placement.”

Student Selection

Specific data identifying student selection criteria was not collected in the survey. However, qualitative comments suggested that previous travel experience and students with strong academic histories were among the criteria considered by programs placing students abroad. Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers, and Cox suggest a series of structured interviews with potential students to assess a student’s ability to adapt to change, openness to learning about other cultures, flexibility, availability of financial resources and appreciation for the diversity that international placements can provide (2010).

Areas for Further Research

The data from this study indicated that future research is needed on identifying funding sources for international placements, with special consideration given to surveying the interest level of large global agencies to help fund international social work placements. Internationally-focused aid organizations may be an untapped resource for funding international placements, as well as corporate entities. The social work profession would benefit from research on how social work programs can better collaborate to develop international opportunities. Consortia could pool their access to potential placement sites, supervision, and support resources, and thus make it easier for programs to send students abroad. Lager, Mathiesen, Rodgers, and Cox suggest in their *Guidebook for International Field Placements and Student Exchanges* (2010) that programs need to share names of funding organizations and resources if university consortia are used. Increasing access and sustaining long-term international field placement programs seems unlikely without a more coordinated, collaborative effort by international partnerships that include universities, agencies, and both corporate and government-sponsored funders.

This study did not collect data on faculty accompaniment during international placements. Future research should identify the roles of faculty members participating in international placements, noting the parameters of their responsibilities.

Conclusion

Researchers have previously documented international field placement opportunities and participation rates among schools of social work. This study further identified how international placements are delivered and offers structural recommendations for programs interested in developing international placements. The research describes different placement models and includes details such as supervision, orientation, and student requirements.

Currently, only a small number of students are able to take advantage of international placement opportunities, but the benefits of an international placement are invaluable. As one respondent stated, "Students gain a perspective they cannot gain here. The learning is immeasurable."

The concept of international social work is evolving, and students are beginning to express more interest in international placements. Social workers have the opportunity to work with diverse populations throughout their career. Cultural humility, along with a solid grasp on multicultural issues, is imperative for a successful career. International field experiences enhance a student's understanding of cultural humility, and likely the student's commitment to work towards a more socially just and culturally competent world.

This study provides basic structural recommendations for programs developing their own international placements. The authors hope that sharing this information will encourage programs to collaborate and share resources, and will ultimately increase student accessibility and the number of social work programs offering international field experiences.

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Table 1. Location and Frequency of Placements

| Location of Placements | Number of Placements Programs | Location of Placements | Number of Placements Programs |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Africa | 2 | Norway | 1 |
| Albania | 1 | Panama | 1 |
| Argentina | 1 | Peru | 4 |
| Australia | 5 | Philippines | 4 |
| Belize | 1 | Romania | 8 |
| Botswana | 1 | Rwanda | 1 |
| Brazil | 2 | Scotland | 2 |
| Cambodia | 1 | Singapore | 1 |
| Cameroon | 1 | South Africa | 7 |
| Canada | 4 | South Korea | 2 |
| Chile | 1 | Swaziland | 1 |
| China | 4 | Sweden | 2 |
| Costa Rica | 3 | Switzerland | 3 |
| Denmark | 1 | Tanzania | 1 |
| Dominica | 1 | Thailand | 2 |
| Dominican Republic | 1 | The Gambia | 1 |
| Ecuador | 4 | Uganda | 5 |
| Egypt | 1 | Ukraine | 1 |
| England | 3 | Vietnam | 1 |
| Ethiopia | 1 | | |
| Germany | 3 | | |
| Ghana | 7 | | |
| Guatemala | 6 | | |
| Haiti | 2 | | |
| Honduras | 2 | | |
| Hong Kong | 2 | | |
| India | 11 | | |
| Indonesia | 1 | | |
| Ireland | 2 | | |
| Israel | 1 | | |
| Italy | 1 | | |
| Japan | 1 | | |
| Jordan | 1 | | |
| Kenya | 3 | | |
| Malaysia | 2 | | |
| Mexico | 7 | | |
| Moldova | 1 | | |
| Nepal | 1 | | |
| New Zealand | 1 | | |
| Northern Ireland | 1 | | |

Table 2. How Programs Ensured That a Non-MSW Field Instructor Met CSWE Requirements

| How programs ensured adequate supervision | Percent of Programs |
|--|---------------------|
| The field director communicates with the student and agency weekly and enforces a social work perspective | 33% |
| The faculty field liaison communicates with the student and agency weekly and enforces a social work perspective | 48% |
| An MSW from a local university provides supervision for the student once weekly | 33% |
| An MSW from a local agency provides supervision for the student once weekly | 33% |
| Other | 25% |