Branch Campuses: Extending the Reach of Social Work Education

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**ABSTRACT**
The study explored the characteristics and experiences of branch campus social work education programs and educators in the United States. Eighty-one branch campus social work educators in 26 states completed an online survey. Findings revealed that undergraduate and graduate branch campus social work education was primarily delivered face-to-face to nontraditional students. Half of these programs were recently established, and the majority were expected to grow. However, teaching these students was not necessarily viewed as a shared responsibility. Although some branch campus faculty reported higher workloads and limited connections to parent campus colleagues, faculty generally reported great satisfaction teaching branch campus students. Practical implications are provided.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Accepted: January 2018

Sometimes referred to as a regional, satellite, partner, distributed, extension, institute, concurrent-use, or joint-use campus (Merzer, 2008; NABCA, n.d.), a branch campus is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (2006) as “a campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary, is located in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers full programs of study, not just courses” (p. G1). Larger branches (greater than 2,500 students) tend to be stand-alone spaces, whereas smaller campus branches (less than 200 students) are likely to be co-located with other colleges or universities (Bebko & Huffman, 2011).

Historically, branch campuses were created to increase the public’s access to postsecondary education (Merzer, 2008). These campuses provide greater accessibility, particularly for students in rural, largely remote areas, who often are first-generation students (Ellis, Sawyer, Gill, Medlin, & Wilson, 2005; Fonseca & Bird, 2007; Oliaro & Trotter, 2010; Wolfe & Strange, 2003). In fact, Fonseca and Bird (2007) noted that branch campuses “have helped to create much of the explosion in college attendance by nontraditional students [and these campuses] exist because they are a response to that burgeoning enrollment” (para. 3). In addition to increasing access to underserved students, branch campuses may be created in response to a parent institution’s desire to increase its regional influence, respond to community or industry needs, or increase its revenue stream (Bebko & Huffman, 2011; Bird, 2011). It may be for these reasons that the number of branch campuses have been increasing (Hoyt & Howell, 2012).

Social work education is being delivered at branch campuses (CSWE, 2012) and is doing so through a variety of course delivery methods including face-to-face, online, and interactive television (Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman, & Cross-Denny, 2012; Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009). Regardless of location or delivery format, however, social work education programs are expected to meet the Council on Social Work Education’s (CSWE, 2015) accreditation standards. Although a program is required to meet these standards and report information regarding each of its locations and delivery formats, the CSWE (2016) only accredits the degree program itself. Western Kentucky University’s (WKU) CSWE-accredited undergraduate social work program, for example, delivers course work in a variety of formats to students at its parent campus as well as at three branch campuses. Nevertheless, although WKU is required to demonstrate that it meets educational
standards at each of its campuses using all delivery methods, WKU’s BSW program is treated as a single program by the CSWE in its reaffirmation process.

Although the educational standards of branch campus social work programs are equivalent to their parent campus programs (CSWE, 2012), in what ways do these branch campus programs differ? What are these campuses like? Who are branch campus social work students, and what are the experiences and perspectives of faculty teaching in branch campus social work programs?

A profile of branch campus social work programs including methods of course delivery, student characteristics, and the experiences of resident versus nonresident faculty teaching in these programs has not previously been investigated. Developing a profile presents an opportunity to inform social work programs currently delivering—or considering the delivery of—their program at a branch campus. In turn, this can inform how programs support their faculty teaching in these programs and what they might anticipate regarding branch campus students’ needs and preferences. This study represents a preliminary exploration of programs and faculty who are extending the reach of social work education at branch campuses.

**Review of the literature**

The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) does not consider all branch campuses as separate from their parent institutions. As a consequence, an incomplete picture of the institutional characteristics of these campuses has been provided (Fonseca & Bird, 2007). Although the number of branch campuses in the United States is unknown, a general profile of branch campuses has been developed by Bebko and Huffman (2011). They found that branch campuses may differ based on (a) the size of the student body, (b) the size and location of the campus relative to the parent campus, (c) the number and composition of part-time versus full-time teaching faculty, (d) the extent of student services and personnel provided on site, and (e) the nature and structure of the leadership and administration of the campus (Bebko & Huffman, 2011). In this last area, the extent to which a university’s administrative and organizational functions are centralized at the parent campus or distributed to the branch campus varies across institutions (Dengerink, 2001). Some of these campuses may be locally administered, provide student services, and may have a resident faculty with faculty oversight from the main campus (Bird, 2014). Other campuses may be staffed by nonresident faculty who commute to the branch campus from the parent campus (Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001). However, greater distances between the parent and branch campuses necessarily decreases the likelihood a full-time faculty member from the parent campus will also teach at a branch campus (Bebko & Huffman, 2011). For this reason, some branch campuses may be more reliant on part-time versus full-time faculty, a situation that is more likely at smaller branch campuses (Bebko & Huffman, 2011; Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001). In addition, institutions are more likely to use contingent faculty on non-tenure-track appointments at their branch campuses (American Association of University Professors, 2014).

For some institutions, management, hiring, and tenure and promotion processes at their branch campuses are coordinated from and determined by the parent campus, whereas for others, the branch campus may have greater degrees of autonomy in these areas (Diehl et al., 2011; Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001). Decisions about branch campus faculty members’ tenure, for instance, may be determined from the parent campus using the same criteria applied to parent campus faculty. At other institutions, tenure decisions may be made at the branch campus or within a university’s branch campus system (Barton, Book, & Heaphy, 2009; Dengerink, 2001). The criteria for tenure and promotion decisions may also vary between the parent and branch campuses. For a research-intensive institution, branch campus faculty members’ productivity may be more likely to match the expectations placed on their parent campus colleagues (Dengerink, 2001). Alternatively, given some of the unique characteristics and needs of branch campus students, teaching skills and experience may weigh more heavily in faculty selection and evaluation criteria at branch campuses (Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001).
Branch campus students

In general, branch campus students are more likely to be nontraditional (Fonseca & Bird, 2007; Hoyt & Howell, 2012; Wolfe & Strange, 2003), more likely to be commuting to campus from their home, are older, and are balancing multiple responsibilities including work and care for families (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Choy, 2002; Compton, Cox, & Lanaan, 2006; Fonseca & Bird, 2007; Knefelkamp & Stewart, 1983; Mindrup, 2012). Geographical proximity to the branch campus, convenient class times, typically smaller class sizes, a preference for face-to-face learning, a perception that courses at the branch campus may be easier than at the parent campus, and a favorable environment for studying may influence a student’s decision to pursue course work at a branch campus (Bird, 2014; Chairsell, 2015; Ellis et al., 2005; Hoyt & Howell, 2012; Mindrup, 2012). Additional reasons students favor branch campuses include higher levels of contact with faculty including adjunct faculty members who are working professionals, access to a specific course from a specific instructor, or more readily available academic and personalized support from faculty and staff. According to Pascarella and Terenzini, for some students, a small branch campus may present greater opportunities for integration and social involvement in campus life than would a larger campus (as cited in Merzer, 2008). Students may also value connecting with peers with similar life experiences or seek opportunities for social interaction apart from their other nonacademic obligations (Ellis et al., 2005; Hoyt & Howell, 2012; Merzer, 2008; Mindrup, 2012). In addition, the reputation of the parent campus may influence a student’s choice to enroll at the branch campus (Hoyt & Howell, 2012).

Branch campus faculty

For faculty members, branch campuses may offer the opportunity to work more closely with students, particularly those with nontraditional experiences. Branch campus faculty have described the branch campus as a friendly working environment in which faculty have higher levels of professional and personal autonomy and more flexibility in their work schedule. Furthermore, given the close physical proximity of faculty to each other on smaller branch campuses and collegiality across disciplines, including cooperation to address student concerns with branch campus colleagues, have been reported. Moreover, branch campus faculty members, particularly at smaller campuses, have described greater opportunities to be involved in efforts to affect change at the campus and in the local community (Bird, 2014; Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001; Poling, LoSchiavo, & Shatz, 2009; Wolfe & Strange, 2003).

Challenges for branch campus faculty

Although the literature highlights a number of opportunities, branch campus faculty members may also face stressors unique to their experience at a branch campus. For instance, they may have to contend with negative perceptions, imagined and real, that a branch campus is lesser in status and enjoys fewer resources relative to the parent campus (Merzer, 2008; Wolfe & Strange, 2003). There may be a perception that branch campuses are less prestigious, and parent campus faculty may hold the erroneous view that their branch campus counterparts have a lesser workload (Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001). However, branch campus faculty often have the responsibility as the sole lead faculty member for a program on that campus, and may experience additional stressors because of “(a) greater job complexity [and demands on time and energy including recruiting new students into their discipline], (b) generalist role expectations, (c) professional isolation, and (d) limited collegiality” (Wolfe & Strange, 2003, p. 350).

Some branch campus faculty may feel isolated and miss opportunities to share information and collaborate with colleagues from their shared discipline at the parent campus (Merzer, 2008; Motter, 1999; Wolfe & Strange, 2003). Although collegiality with other disciplines has been cited by faculty as a benefit to being at a branch campus, Wolfe and Strange (2003) observed that information sharing regarding teaching strategies, for instance, was limited. Further, branch campus faculty’s scholarship
may take “second place” (p. 360) to other demands on their time (Wolfe & Strange, 2003). In fact, branch campus faculty members often face “the scholarly expectations of a research university, the teaching load of small private institutions, and the community service duties of regional public schools” (Padilla, 2009, p. 73).

Given this circumstance, Fonseca and Bird (2007) have argued that tenure and promotion criteria at such an institution should be flexible enough to accommodate the challenge of balancing these responsibilities. This may mean that institutions, program administrators, and faculty colleagues consider how they (a) appreciate the unique teaching and student advising needs at a branch campus, (b) promote frequent and open communication between their campuses, (c) encourage collaboration and partnerships between main campus and branch campus faculty members (as well as among branch campus faculty members), (d) ensure access to parent campus resources, and (e) include branch faculty in departmental decision making (Merzer, 2008; Poling et al., 2009).

Prior to this study, the extent to which this administrative and collegial support was available to social work faculty teaching in branch campus programs was unknown. Additionally, the extent to which these faculty identify these opportunities and challenges as relevant to their experiences was also unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand branch campus social work programs as well as educators’ experiences in these programs.

Method

The specific institutional characteristics of CSWE-accredited branch campus social work programs including method of course delivery, the types of students in these programs, and the demographic profile of resident and nonresident social work educators who teach branch campus students was explored in this study. In addition, the study investigated the reports of resident branch campus educators in terms of their responsibilities, perceptions about workload, connections to the parent campus, and overall satisfaction in this role.

Materials and procedures

At the time of the study, the CSWE did not include branch campus social work programs in its directory of accredited programs. In addition, no database of branch campus doctoral social work programs was available. Therefore, we reviewed the program websites of all institutions providing social work education in the United States to determine which programs provided education to branch campus social work students. At the time of the study, there were 542 institutions providing bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral social work programs. When a website could not be accessed, or an initial determination could not be made, we contacted the social work program directly to gather additional information. In addition, e-mail requests were sent to two social work education electronic mailing lists asking members if their social work education program delivered content to students at their institution’s branch campuses. From this investigation, 89 social work programs in 39 states were identified.

Instrument

Approved by our institutional review board, a 55-item survey instrument developed by the researchers integrated demographic items related to respondents’ social and professional identities including their campus assignment (i.e., a resident faculty member at a branch campus, a parent campus, or at neither campus). Additional items gathered information about the institutional characteristics of respondents’ parent and branch campuses as well as their social work program, and a number of items assessed their experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction teaching in their branch campus program.

A number of items were derived from the literature and our experiences as resident branch campus faculty members. For instance, the reports of Merzer (2008), Motter (1999), and Wolfe and Strange (2003) that some branch campus faculty may feel isolated from parent campus colleagues corresponded
with the experiences of some of us. For this reason, resident branch campus faculty members were asked, “During this academic year, approximately how often have you visited your parent campus?” with a 6-point response set (from never to more than once per week, 1-more than once per week, 2-once per week, 3-twice per month, 4-once per month, 5-less than once per month, 0-never). In addition, these respondents were asked whether they also taught a social work course at their college or university’s parent campus and about collaboration with parent campus colleagues. Three items began with the prompt, “During this academic year, to what extent have you collaborated with social work colleagues from your parent campus on—” Respondents then indicated the extent of their collaboration on teaching, research, and service on a 3-point scale (not at all, occasionally, and frequently, 1-not at all, 2-occasionally, 3-frequently).

Other items were similarly developed. For instance, Nickerson and Schaefer’s (2001) observation that branch campus faculty may be perceived to have lesser workloads than their main campus counterparts correlated with their own perceptions. This prompted several items in our study related to resident branch campus faculty members’ assessment of their workload in comparison to their parent campus colleagues. For example, resident branch campus faculty members who indicated they had primary responsibility for academic advising of branch campus social work students were asked, “In general, how do your student advising responsibilities compare to social work colleagues’ responsibilities based at the parent/main campus?” And more directly, “In general, how does your overall workload compare to the workload of resident social work faculty members on the parent/main campus?” Respondents answered these questions with a 3-point response set (lower, about the same, and higher, 1-lower, 2-about the same, 3-higher).

To assess for content and face validity, 12 full- and part-time faculty members who taught social work courses at least at one of three branch campuses affiliated with our institution completed a pilot version of the survey and provided feedback, which was incorporated into the revised instrument.

Data collection
The program administrators from 89 programs identified as delivering branch campus social work education were sent e-mails on three occasions to request them to forward a study invitation to their faculty members who taught branch campus social work classes. Two additional invitations were posted on a social work education electronic mailing list to invite those who met eligibility criteria to participate in the study. The survey was hosted and data were collected using the online Qualtrics Survey Platform.

Data analysis
For this cross-sectional, nonexperimental study, descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample, characteristics of respondents’ branch campus programs and their parent institutions, and respondents’ observations about their experiences. As relevant to the data, measures of central tendency (i.e., mean and median), distribution (i.e., frequency), and dispersion (i.e., range and standard deviation) are reported and compared. In addition, bivariate analyses (i.e., t tests) assessed differences between and within groups of respondents.

Results
In addition to respondents’ demographic profile, the following sections report on the institutional characteristics of the respondents’ parent institutions, their branch campus, and their social work program, including the program’s students and educators. Perceptions of resident and nonresident branch campus faculty are reported in terms of their connections to the parent campus, workload, and support and satisfaction in their role.
**Demographic profile of respondents**

Eighty-one (n=81) social work educators from social work education programs in 26 states completed the survey. Respondents took an average of 15 minutes to complete the survey. It should be noted that a response rate could not be determined because the total population of branch campus social work educators was not known at the time of the study.

Sixty-four social work educators (79.0%) identified as female and 17 (21.0%) as male. Sixty-eight educators (84.0%) were White or non-Hispanic; seven (8.6%) were African American; three (3.7%) were Latino, Latina), or Hispanic; three (3.7%) were Asian or Pacific Islander; and one (1.2%) identified as American Indian or Native American. The majority (n=64, 79.0%) reported they were full-time faculty members, and 17 (21.0%) indicated they were part-time or adjunct faculty members. Eleven (13.6%) were professors, 14 (17.3%) identified as associate professor, 25 (30.9%) were assistant professors, 27 (33.3%) were classified as lecturer or instructor, and four (4.9%) identified as other. Twenty-one participants (25.9%) reported they were tenured, 22 (27.2%) were on the tenure track, 36 (44.4%) were not on the tenure track even though their institutions had a tenure system, and two (2.5%) reported their institution did not have a tenure system. Collectively, they taught social work courses for an average of 11.7 years (SD=9.3) with half having taught for 8 or more years.

**Description of parent institution**

Eighty respondents (n=80) provided information about the auspice, focus, and setting of their parent institution. Sixty (74.1%) indicated they worked at a public institution; 15 (18.5%) worked at a sectarian, private, non-profit institution; and 5 (6.2%) worked at a nonsectarian, private, not-for-profit institution. Thirty-nine (48.1%) reported they worked at a teaching-oriented institution; 12 (14.8%) reported their institution was research intensive; and 29 (35.8%) indicated equal emphasis on research and teaching. The plurality of these respondents worked at institutions that were identified as urban (n=37, 45.7%), followed by a third (n=27, 33.3%) who worked at a rural institution, and 16 (19.8%) who worked in a suburban setting.

**Description of branch campus**

Respondents provided information about their branch campus in terms of years established, levels of degrees offered in all disciplines, proximity to the parent campus, number of students served by the campus, and the number of full-time resident faculty members in all disciplines. They reported that their branch campuses had been established an average of 18.8 years (SD=23.5, n=68) with 50% of these campuses established within the 10 years prior to the study. Seventy respondents (n=70) provided information about the levels of degrees in all disciplines offered at their branch campus (see Table 1). The largest group reported their branch campus offered full master’s degrees (n=51, 72.9%) followed by full bachelor’s degrees (n=43, 61.4%). Twenty percent (n=14) offered full associate’s degrees, and 10% (n=7) offered full doctoral degrees. Ten respondents (14.3%) reported that their branch campus offered partial undergraduate and graduate degrees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partial Program Offered</th>
<th>Full Program Offered</th>
<th>Not Offered</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
<td>n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>14 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>3 (4.3%)</td>
<td>43 (61.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>5 (7.1%)</td>
<td>51 (72.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>2 (2.9%)</td>
<td>7 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Thirty-eight respondents (n=38, 54.3%) indicated their branch campus offered some combination of partial or full degree programs at more than one degree level. Five (n=5, 7.1%) reported that their campus only offered partial bachelor’s and master’s degrees.
Although some urban branch campuses may have been geographically close to their parent campus, the time to travel between campuses may have been greater than if the campuses were based in a more suburban or rural setting given the likelihood of greater congestion in urban areas. Therefore, the location of the respondents’ branch campus relative to their parent campuses was measured using the time to travel between campuses rather than the physical distance between campuses. Respondents reported that the average trip between their branch and parent campus took about 2 hours ($M=120.7$ minutes, $SD=116.1$ minutes, $n=78$) with a range from 30 minutes to almost 11 hours (642 minutes).

Table 2 provides information about the size of the student and faculty populations at respondents’ branch campuses. Fifty-six respondents ($n=56$) reported the size of the student body at their branch campus, indicating these campuses were midsize, serving an average of 909.2 students ($SD = 2,310.4$) across all disciplines. Although 13,000 students were enrolled at one campus, half of respondents’ campuses had fewer than 90 students, which were considered small branch campuses using Bebko and Huffman’s (2011) typology.

Fifty-eight faculty members ($n=58$) reported that on average there were 25.6 ($SD=61.1$, $n=58$) full-time faculty members from multiple disciplines who worked at their branch campuses. However, 50% of these campuses had four or fewer faculty members, with 17 (29.3%) reporting only one or two faculty members.

Description of branch campus social work program

Respondents reported their social work program had been in place for an average of 10.2 years ($SD=8.4$, $n=63$), with a range of 1 to 40 years and a median of 8 years. Sixty-nine ($n=69$) respondents provided information about the social work degrees offered in their branch campus program (see Table 3). The largest group reported their branch campus offered the full master’s degree ($n=47$, 68.1%) followed by the full bachelor’s degree ($n=39$, 56.5%). Twenty-one respondents ($n=21$, 30.4%) indicated their branch campus offered a full bachelor’s and a full master’s degree social work program. Only one respondent (1.4%) indicated her branch campus offered a full doctoral program. A small number reported that their branch campus offered partial social work programs at either level ($n=8$, 11.6%).

Sixty-six faculty members ($n=66$) reported on the primary method of delivering course content to branch campus students, and the most frequent method cited was face-to-face ($n = 57$, 86.4%), followed by interactive television ($n=6$, 9.1%), and other ($n=3$, 4.5%). No respondent indicated courses were primarily delivered online; however, one respondent said that her program was delivered face-to-face in the first year and online in the second.

Of the 66 faculty members who provided information about who taught in their branch campus social work program, 27 (40.9%) said these were mostly taught by full-time faculty, 20 (30.3%) indicated they were mostly taught by part-time faculty, and 19 (28.8%) reported these were taught by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Number of students and faculty at branch campuses.</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students in all disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members in all disciplines</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Social work degrees offered at the branch campus ($n=69$).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Partial Program Offered</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$ (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Twenty-five ($n=25$) respondents indicated their branch campus offered some combination of partial or full bachelor's and master's degrees.*
full- and part-time faculty equally. Up to 10 full-time resident social work faculty members taught at their branch campuses with an average of 2.6 faculty members (SD=2.5, \(n=65\)). Nine (13.8\%) respondents indicated there were no full-time resident social work faculty members at their branch campus, although there were resident faculty members in other disciplines at this campus. Of the 64 who provided information, only 6 (9.4\%) reported all parent campus faculty members taught in the branch campus program, 6 (9.4\%) indicated more than half (but not all) taught at both campuses, and 11 (17.2\%) indicated about half did so. In contrast, 28 (43.8\%) reported less than half taught these classes, and 13 (20.3\%) reported that no social work faculty members assigned to the parent or main campus also taught branch campus classes.

**Description of branch campus social work students**

Sixty-four respondents (\(n=64\)) reported an average of 90.1 students with a range from 4 to 865 social work students enrolled in their branch campus programs in 2015–2016. However, half of these respondents’ branch campus social work programs had fewer than 60 students. Average social work class sizes ranged from four to 50 students with an average of 16.9 students (SD=7.0, \(n=66\)) and a median of 15 students. Of the 66 respondents who provided information, 29 (43.9\%) indicated it was about the same, and eight (12.1\%) reported their class sizes were larger. Sixty-five respondents (\(n=65\)) said the student enrollment in their branch campus social work program was expected to change over the next 5 years (through 2020 to 2021). Forty respondents (\(n=40, 61.5\%)\) reported that enrollment would increase, 18 (27.7\%) indicated it would likely remain about the same, and seven (10.8\%) indicated it was expected to decrease.

In response to an open-ended question, 59 respondents indicated how their branch campus social work students compared to social work students at the parent or main campus (see Table 4). Although seven respondents (11.9\%) reported their branch campus students were similar to parent campus students, others indicated a much more diverse, nontraditional group. Their branch campus students were older (\(n=24, 40.7\%)\), had more work experience (\(n=8, 13.6\%)\), were more likely to be place bound (\(n=8, 13.6\%)\), and were lower income compared to the parent campus (\(n=8, 13.6\%)\). Four respondents (\(n=4, 6.8\%)\) reported their students were more racially diverse, and two (3.4\%) indicated their branch campus had more first-generation college students.

More than one third of these respondents (\(n=20, 33.9\%)\) reported branch campus students were juggling more responsibilities than their parent campus peers including work and family, but they also reported they were more cohesive as a group (\(n=4, 6.8\%)\). Nine (\(n=9, 15.3\%)\) reported branch campus social work students were a more highly motivated group than parent campus students with two (3.4\%) indicating that branch campus students had a more instrumental approach to their education (i.e., to improve their prospects). However, 14 (23.7\%) observed that branch campus students needed greater academic support than their parent campus peers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same or similar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling multiple responsibilities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need greater academic support</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More motivated</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More work experience</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place bound</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower income</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More racially diverse</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on instrumental value of education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Respondents may have identified more than one descriptor.*
**Description of branch campus social work educators**

Thirty-two ($n=32$) of 64 (50.0%) resident and nonresident faculty members reported they had volunteered to teach in their branch campus social work program, whereas the other half reported they had been assigned ($n=32$, 50.0%). Regarding their assignment, the largest group ($n=45$, 55.6%) were resident faculty members at the branch campus, whereas 29 (35.8%) were resident faculty members at the parent or main campus. Seven participants (8.6%) indicated they were neither a resident faculty member at the parent campus nor at a branch campus. (All but one was a part-time or adjunct faculty member.) Resident faculty members had been in their role for an average of 5.4 years ($SD=4.7$, $n=41$) with a range from 1 to 25 years; however, half were relatively new having been in this role for 4 or fewer years.

**Connections to parent campus.** As noted previously, more than half of respondents were either a resident faculty member at their branch campus (55.6%, $n=45$) or nonresident at either campus (8.6%, $n=7$). Forty-five ($n=45$) of these respondents reported the frequency with which they visited the parent campus during the prior academic year. The largest group visited less than once a month (33.3%, $n=15$) followed by once per month (22.2%, $n=10$). Seven respondents (15.6%) reported they had not visited their parent campus at all. Only 4 (8.9%) reported visiting their parent campus once per week, and 5 (11.1%) reported more than once per week. However, of the 38 who had visited their parent campus in the previous year, only 10 respondents (26.3%) had also taught a class on the parent campus.

Resident branch campus faculty members and those not assigned to either the branch or parent campus reported on the frequency with which they had collaborated with faculty members at the parent campus over the prior academic year (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *occasionally*, and 3 = *frequently*; see Table 5). They collaborated most frequently on teaching ($M=2.16$, $SD=.64$, $n=45$), occasionally on service ($M=2.08$, $SD=.76$, $n=40$), with the least amount on research ($M=1.77$, $SD=.84$, $n=39$).

In fact, Figure 1 illustrates the most frequent responses in terms of collaboration were occasionally for teaching ($n=26$, 57.8%), occasionally for service ($n=17$, 42.5%), and not at all ($n=19$, 48.7%) for research. Five (11.4%) respondents indicated research was not relevant to their assignment, whereas three (7.0%) reported service was not relevant.

**Workload.** Respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that teaching in the branch campus program was viewed as a shared responsibility by parent and branch campus social work faculty ($M=2.98$, $SD=1.5$, $n=65$) (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Resident faculty at the parent campus were less inclined to view this responsibility as shared ($M=2.95$, $SD=1.70$, $n=20$) than resident branch campus faculty ($M=3.05$, $SD=1.50$, $n=41$); however, an independent samples $t$ test found that the difference was not significant, $t(59)=-.23$, $p=.82$.

In terms of recruiting students into the branch campus social work program, Table 6 shows that almost one third of the 65 respondents who provided information ($n=21$, 32.3%) reported that this was primarily their responsibility, whereas 8 (12.3%) indicated it was a shared responsibility among social work faculty in their programs. Social work administrators were also reported as having primary responsibility for student recruitment ($n=9$, 13.8%) as were professional admissions staff ($n=14$, 21.5%).

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In terms of advising students, the largest number of respondents (n=22, 33.8%) had the primary responsibility in this area followed by other social work faculty (n=14, 21.5%). For 13 respondents (20.0%), this was a shared responsibility among social work faculty. However, for the 17 resident branch campus faculty members who were the primary adviser, 15 (88.2%) reported that they had greater advising responsibilities than their parent campus colleagues. Although two (11.8%) felt their responsibilities were equivalent, none reported that his or her advising responsibilities were less than those of the parent campus colleagues (see Figure 2).

When asked about their overall workload compared to faculty members on the parent campus, 17 of 41 (41.5%) resident branch campus faculty members reported it was about the same, whereas the same number (41.5%, n=17) reported it was higher. Only seven (17.1%) indicated the overall workload was lower (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, tenured or tenure-track resident branch campus faculty members generally agreed that expectations for tenure and promotion adequately accounted for their work responsibilities as a resident faculty member on the branch campus (M=3.62, SD=1.35, n=21; 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

**Support and satisfaction.** Table 7 provides information about resident branch campus faculty members’ assessment regarding whether they felt they had status equal to faculty on the parent campus, whether they felt supported by their social work colleagues and leadership, and whether they were satisfied with their assignment on the branch campus and teaching branch campus students (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).
Although the branch campus faculty assessment of their status relative to their parent campus social work colleagues was comparatively low \((M=3.27, SD=1.43, n=41)\), they felt supported by these colleagues and by the leadership of their program. However, a paired-samples \(t\) test found that they reported a significantly lower level of support from their colleagues \((M=3.88, SD=1.16, n=41)\) than from the leadership in their program \((M=4.15, SD=1.25, n=41)\), \(t(40)=-2.43, p<.05\), but the effect size was small, Cohen’s \(d=.38\). Regardless, they reported satisfaction with their assignment as a resident faculty member at a branch campus \((M=4.63, SD=.77, n=41)\).

Finally, when assessed in aggregate, resident branch campus and nonresident social work faculty indicated satisfaction in teaching branch campus students \((M=4.29, SD=1.11, n=65)\); however, an independent-samples \(t\) test found that resident branch campus faculty members reported a significantly greater level of satisfaction \((M=4.68, SD=.65, n=41)\) than their nonresident counterparts \((M=3.67, SD=1.43, n=24)\), \(t(29)=-3.28, p<.01\), and the effect size was large, Cohen’s \(d=.98\). (Levene’s test indicated unequal variances \((F=23.73, p<.05)\), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 63 to 29.)

**Discussion**

The study sought to better understand the unique characteristics of social work education programs at branch campuses including the experiences and perspectives of those who teach in them. Findings indicated that although they may vary in student population size, public and private institutions are delivering undergraduate and graduate social work education to students in urban, rural, and suburban settings in the United States. In doing so, they are extending the reach of the parent campus program to a largely nontraditional group of students who may be place bound because of work and family obligations.
Half the programs in this study were more recently established, and the majority reported that student enrollment would be expanding. This finding appears to reflect a rising demand for branch campus social work education, particularly from nontraditional students. Further, the majority of these branch campus educators reported that their programs delivered their education face-to-face, which appears to correspond with Hoyt and Howell’s (2012) observation that branch campus students may prefer this teaching method.

With regard to the faculty experience, branch campus faculty generally felt they had equal status to their parent campus colleagues; however, they were far more ambiguous about whether teaching in the branch campus program was viewed as a shared responsibility among all faculty members in their social work program. This ambiguity could have been a function of the number of parent campus faculty also teaching in the branch campus programs. The plurality of respondents reported that either less than half or no social work faculty members assigned to the parent or main campus also taught branch campus classes. The distance between the parent and branch campuses may have contributed to this. From a practical standpoint, if a program predominantly offered face-to-face courses at a branch campus, parent campus faculty members may not have had time to regularly travel between sites, especially if they were at a significant distance from the branch campus as some faculty members reported in this study. For this reason, parent campus faculty may not have had the opportunity to teach in their branch campus program. Alternatively, if parent campus faculty members believed the branch campus held lesser status and enjoyed fewer resources than their parent campus (Merzer, 2008; Nickerson & Schaefer, 2001; Wolfe & Strange, 2003), there is a possibility they may have been reluctant to teach in the branch campus program.

In some cases, connections between parent campus colleagues and resident branch campus faculty as well as those not assigned to either campus may be limited. The latter group may spend little time, if any, teaching classes at their parent campus. Further, if parent campus faculty are not teaching at the branch campus, this may explain why some branch campus faculty reported having limited opportunities to collaborate with colleagues on teaching and service, and rarely on research. Again, distance between campuses could be a key factor. Regardless of the cause, however, there is potential for branch campus faculty members to feel isolated from their peers (Merzer, 2008; Motter, 1999; Wolfe & Strange, 2003).

Not surprisingly, those who teach branch campus students are likely to have the largest role in recruiting and advising branch campus students. However, for resident branch campus faculty, their advising loads may be higher than their counterparts at the parent campus. This is not unexpected if, in general, a higher percentage of branch campus students are nontraditional; and, as Mindrup (2012) has mentioned, may require closer academic advising. Because branch campus faculty are sometimes the sole lead faculty member from their discipline, this may also lead to experiences of isolation as they face additional workload pressures (e.g., advising, student recruitment into their discipline; Merzer, 2008; Wolfe & Strange, 2003). This, in turn, may contribute to some resident branch campus faculty’s feeling that their workload is higher than the workload of their parent campus colleagues. However, most important, whether there were workload issues, limited connections between colleagues, or disparate views about the responsibility to teach branch campus students, those who taught these students, particularly those based at the branch campus, reported great satisfaction with this responsibility.

Practical implications

For social work education programs that deliver, or whose directors are considering delivering, their courses to branch campus students, findings from this study prompt several considerations. Respondents reported that their programs primarily delivered their branch campus education face-to-face or by interactive television. It is unclear whether these delivery methods were selected in response to student needs or preferences, faculty interests, or some other factor. Nevertheless,
Program directors should consider branch campus students’ needs and preferences, particularly given that these students may prefer face-to-face class time, may expect greater levels of support from faculty members, and may be more dependent on peer support from classmates (Ellis et al., 2005; Hoyt & Howell, 2012; Mindrup, 2012).

A further consideration is the degree to which faculty members at the parent campus are able to invest or are invested in teaching branch campus students. Aside from the possibility that some parent campus faculty may be unable to get to the branch campus because of other obligations at the parent campus, is this responsibility viewed as a shared responsibility? If not, how can this responsibility be promoted? And if relevant to the position, how can collaboration on teaching, service, and research be fostered between resident parent campus and resident branch campus faculty members? This would be especially important if there are few resident social work faculty members at the branch campus, and particularly if tenure and promotion expectations are the same for the parent and branch campus faculty. In these cases, in what ways can tenured parent campus faculty mentor branch campus faculty to increase the likelihood of their colleagues’ retention?

Similarly, program directors should be sensitive to resident branch campus faculty members’ workload and advising responsibilities. In this respect, program administrators might explore whether promotion and tenure expectations can be reasonably adapted, as Fonseca and Bird (2007) have argued, to these unique demands. Encouragingly, this study appears to indicate that social work programs with branch campuses may already be accommodating their resident, tenure-track branch campus faculty given this group’s general agreement that expectations for tenure and promotion at their institutions adequately accounted for their work responsibilities.

Although not explored in this study, consideration of the CSWE’s reaffirmation of accreditation process is warranted. Social work programs must ensure that academic quality and programmatic integrity is consistent between parent and branch campus programs (Pruitt & Silverman, 2015). Regardless of the campus, to promote the attainment of similar student learning outcomes, standard course syllabi are used and described in a program’s explicit curriculum. However, programs may describe a variety of practices across their campuses in terms of meeting particular Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. Under Accreditation Standard 3.0.1, for instance, a social work program is expected “to provide a learning environment that models affirmation and respect for diversity and difference” (CSWE, 2015, p. 14). This could prove challenging, for example, if the population of a branch campus’s community is more homogenous than that of the parent campus community. This, in turn, could limit students’ access to more diverse cultural experiences or an educator’s access to a diverse set of local guest speakers. For this reason, social work programs may be required to creatively and thoughtfully consider how best to adhere to this educational policy (and others) for each of its campuses.

**Limitations**

There is a possibility that the total number of social work education programs offered at branch campuses was not identified in the study. Further, faculty members from some of the programs we identified may not have seen or responded to the invitation to participate in this study. Moreover, because respondents self-selected into the study, their responses may not reflect the perceptions and experiences of those who did not participate in the study, and it is not known whether any respondents were faculty members from the same institution or taught in the same branch campus program. Finally, in order to ensure their anonymity, educators were not asked to indicate their particular institution or program location. Therefore, it is unknown whether these educators, or the programs in which they taught, were representative of all branch campus social work programs or the total population of educators teaching in these programs. For these reasons, the generalizability of these findings is limited.
Future research

The specific tenure and promotion criteria social work programs use for their resident branch campus faculty was not investigated in this study. Therefore, an exploration of the extent to which social work programs accommodate, if at all, the unique demands of the branch campus setting and the potential workload differential branch campus faculty have reported is warranted. More specifically, how do social work programs ensure that these branch campus faculty accomplish the requisite balance of responsibilities required of them in teaching, research, and service on their path toward tenure and promotion?

Research should also explore the characteristics, interests, and needs of branch campus social work students. What factors do students consider when they choose a branch campus program? Moreover, what is their preferred method of delivery (i.e., face-to-face, interactive television, online, or some hybrid model)? In addition, from the perspectives of branch campus students and those who teach them, how can programs best meet these students’ unique educational needs?

Conclusion

This profile of branch campus social work programs, educators, and students revealed that these programs may be expanding. Even with the proliferation of online education (Fonseca & Bird, 2007), the presence and significance of branch campus social work education programs that predominantly deliver course work face-to-face should not be underestimated or underappreciated in terms of the access they provide to largely nontraditional students. Similarly, the demands and rewards of faculty members who teach in these programs should be recognized and valued. After all, branch campuses and their faculty are extending the reach of social work education.

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References


