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Abstract

The field of social work worldwide has been increasingly influenced by globalization, migration, and other conditions that require professionals to be responsive and knowledgeable in addressing them. This collaborative project examined students' perceptions of international social work at three universities in the United States, United Kingdom, and Georgia. Students' responses indicated an overall strong interest and widespread agreement that there is a link between local and global social issues. The findings suggest that social work education needs to be globalized and tailored to students' needs, which will help them identify social work strongly as part of a profession and affect change across the globe.

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Keywords

Comparative, global social issues, global social work, globalization, international social work, social work education, student perceptions

The emerging and expanding global economy, globalization, migration, common problems across countries and interdependence have increased the focus on the role and importance of international social work. Individual countries' practices and policies are significantly influenced by international approaches and are interdependent on solutions considered by other countries (Midgley, 1997; Ramanathan and Link, 1999).

A number of authors have discussed the effects of globalization on social work (Deacon et al., 1997; Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996; Giarchi and Lankshear, 1998; Trevillion, 1997; Washington and Paylor, 1998). Many global issues, such as poverty and oppression, have effects on the welfare of the entire world (Asamoah et al., 1997; Caragata and Sanchez, 2002). Social workers are facing global social problems such as street children, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and so on. Social work practice more and more requires activities in response to these problems locally and internationally. There is a great need for social work practitioners operating in any contexts – local, national or international – to understand the global forces, to be adequately trained, and be able to practice effectively (Asamoah et al., 1997; Midgley, 2000).

In the context of globalization and social service provision to immigrants and refugees in local communities, there is a need to emphasize international social work perspectives within social work education and offer opportunities to social workers to provide high-quality social services. Nowadays social workers have more prospects of being involved in international work and research due to the enhanced opportunities for international sharing and exchanging (e.g. international student exchange programs, joint training, and research projects with international colleagues, etc.); increased number of international organizations and international conferences (Midgley, 2005); and easier access to international and foreign journals and publications (Lalayants et al., 2009).

Many schools of social work around the world have begun to tackle issues of global importance such as refugees and provision of social services to immigrants and foreigners, global child welfare, human rights and international family planning (Rainford, 2006). The importance of addressing these in culturally appropriate ways has been stressed in the literature (Doel and Penn, 2007). Because of clients' and workers' own diversities in culture and backgrounds, an international perspective offers a valuable platform for social workers to share their vision, concerns, experience and

knowledge (Saito and Johns, 2009). Furthermore, it is important for social work students to learn how to be culturally competent at home and in a foreign setting. Theories, practices, and methods of international social work, as well as knowledge of global forces impacting local populations, can be useful to social workers in their daily interactions with clients, specifically in ethnically and culturally diverse communities (Xu, 2006).

International social work education allows students to learn from developing countries about the strategies used to combat social problems *within* those countries (Abram and Cruce, 2007). Students can then apply what they have learned abroad to social issues at home. In the United States, for example, the standards produced by the Council on Social Work Education (2003, 2008) were supportive of international social work, which Healy (2008) defined as activities in international practice, international policy development and advocacy, internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, and professional exchange. While international social work education is important, educators need to be aware of the potential to inadvertently continue a post-colonial tendency to marginalize non-Western voices and ideas by solely promoting Western social work styles and values (Askeland and Payne, 2006, 2007; Razack, 2009). This can be avoided in part by allowing voices from diverse backgrounds to be heard in an international social work classroom (Razack, 2009).

Despite the possible differences in educational, cultural, and professional approaches, social work practitioners and students across countries can greatly benefit from the knowledge and wisdom that international perspectives bring. International social work education can have various benefits to those engaged in either domestic or international work.

Study purpose

Since the role of international social work has been rapidly growing, it is timely to investigate the perceptions of social work students on this topic across different countries. Thus, the purpose of this study was two-fold: a) to examine students' perceptions of international social work in multiple countries with different cultures, backgrounds, and educational systems; and b) to identify how highly social work students value learning about international social work.

This comparative approach to examining the perceptions of international social work education will help educators understand similarities and differences in students' perceptions and potentially design and/or modify courses accordingly. International social work education, tailored to students' needs,

will help them identify social work more strongly as part of a profession that has the capacity to effect change across the globe.

Study sites

For the purposes of this project, a network of participants from three social work schools was established: Hunter College School of Social Work (HCSSW) of the City University of New York, USA; Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), UK; and Tbilisi State University (TSU), Republic of Georgia. The findings presented in this article are part of a larger project that was supported by a grant from the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) to enhance international and cross-cultural collaboration among the three universities (Lalayants et al., 2011).

Methods

Research design and instrument

To find out the degree to which social work students value learning about international social work as well as gauge interest and familiarity with the subject, a survey questionnaire was developed by the three co-authors. The same survey instrument was used in all three schools. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative self-administered survey allowed covering a large student population, generated descriptive information, provided a standardized way of collecting information, and assured confidentiality of the responses. Additionally, the qualitative open-ended questions provided an opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their responses and supply in-depth information. A table of select survey questions is presented in Table 1.

Sampling and data collection

Data collection took place during the first months of the spring semester (February–March 2011). The total number of respondents in this study was 285, including 194 students from HCSSW, 52 from SHU, and 39 from TSU. At HCSSW, there was no sampling applied. One of the co-authors, who is a professor at HCSSW, sent an email announcement to all students inviting them to participate in the study and directing them to the online survey link. Students were asked to follow the link to the anonymous online survey, fill out the questions in the survey, and submit it. It was believed that the email roster contained a total of 530 email addresses. Unfortunately, it

Table I. Select survey questions.

Have you ever lived outside your country?	Yes/no If yes, what countries?
Have you ever worked outside your country?	Yes/no If yes, what was the nature of your employment?
Have you ever taken a course on International Social Work or Global Social Work?	Yes/no If yes, how long ago?
Please rate your current knowledge of international social work	1 – Not very knowledgeable 7 – Very knowledgeable
How important do you think it is for social work students to learn about international social work?	1 – Not at all important 7 – Of the greatest importance
How much do you want to learn about international social work?	1 – Not at all 7 – Very much
If you were briefly explaining to friends who are not social workers what 'international social work' is, how would you describe it to them?	
If you were to move to another country to work as a social worker, what do you think the five biggest differences/challenges would be to your social work practice?	
Are you interested in having communication with social work students from other countries?	1 – Not at all interested 7 – Extremely interested Please explain how beneficial this communication would be
How useful do you expect learning about international social work will be for your professional development?	1 – Not at all useful 7 – Extremely useful
How useful do you expect learning about international social work will be for your personal development?	1 – Not at all useful 7 – Extremely useful

was impossible to have information as to how many of the email addresses were working and how many students actually received the survey email announcement. A total of 194 students chose to respond to the survey. The data were then collected in an Excel spreadsheet, exported to SPSS program, and analyzed. At HCSSW the international social work is an elective course; students can choose to take it anytime during their two-year program.

At SHU the international social work course is mandatory. The sample consisted of the entire student cohort that had enrolled in this course at the time of the study. Since students take this course in their second year only, all 81 second-year undergraduate social work students were invited to participate. Hard copies of the survey were distributed to each person during the first week of the semester by one of the co-authors, who was not the participants' instructor, and time was allocated at the end of a session to complete the questionnaire. This resulted in a 64.2 percent response rate. Students' responses were kept confidential; no identifying information was used in the study. The 52 hard copies of returned questionnaires were coded and analyzed manually.

At TSU all students who had enrolled in the international social work course at the time of the study were invited to participate by distributing the survey questionnaires to them in the auditorium by one of the co-authors who was not teaching that course. International social work is an elective course that is available to second, third and fourth year undergraduate students. Students were asked to fill out the survey questions in the first week of taking the course and drop off the completed questionnaires in a designated box. They were free either to indicate their name or nickname or to remain completely anonymous; nonetheless, confidentiality of the responses was kept. A total of 39 students completed and returned the survey out of about 120 students. The total number of students in these cohorts at the time of the study was 44, resulting in a very high response rate (88.6%). The data were then entered into the SPSS program and analyzed.

Data analysis

Throughout the data analysis process the collaborating parties shared the data and summaries of each site, had discussions about the patterns and themes that emerged from the survey data, and made decisions on the structure and organization of the findings. Once each site completed its data analysis, the results were compiled into one document identifying commonalities and recognizing possible differences in students' perceptions of international social work across three countries and discussing the degree to which students valued learning about international social work.

Ethics approval

Prior to commencing the data collection, an approval of the HCSSW Institutional Review Board was obtained upon the review of the proposed

procedures and the data collection instrument. At SHU and TSU the study was considered exempt by the Ethics Committee.

Findings

Respondent characteristics

There were three particularly striking aspects to the three pictures of the student groups across sites. The first was the similarity in their gender profile, with almost exactly equal ratios of female to male students (87–89% female). It is clear that social work does not attract men and, if gender balance is something that is considered desirable, this is a problem common to all three countries in the study (Table 2).

In contrast to the similarity in terms of gender imbalance was the difference in the ethnic composition of the three groups of student. There was greatest diversity at the US school and least at Georgia. It was interesting to note that whereas descriptions of gender were uncontested, the way in which ethnic boundaries were drawn was very context-specific, with a tendency to clearly define the various ethnic groups in the US, to consider two

Table 2. Respondent characteristics.

	HCSSW-USA	SHU-UK	TSU-Georgia
Age (Mean in years)	30	26	20.25
Range	22–59	19–46	19–23
Gender, %			
Female	89	88	87
Male	11	12	13
Race/ethnicity, %			
White/Caucasian	61	82	95 (Ethnic Georgian)
Latino/Hispanic	15	–	–
Black/African American	14	4 Black African 1 African 1 Black British	–
Asian/South Asian	4	1 Pakistani	–
Bi-racial	3	1 Dual heritage	–
Other	3	–	1 Armenian 1 Greek
Lived abroad, %	53	27	15
Worked abroad, %	28	14	0

basic entities – White and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups – in the UK, and to base difference on national identity in Georgia.

Finally, there was a striking difference in the mean age of students – 10 years older in the US than in Georgia, with Britain falling almost exactly in between; and the age range was considerably greater in the US and UK cohorts than Georgian. The finding was not surprising, as it reflected the fact that the course at HCSSW is at Masters level, attracting a number of mature students who may be transferring to social work from other professions or employments. The courses at TSU and SHU are Bachelors, though both universities also offer masters in social work.

Additionally, respondents were asked about their expedience of living and working abroad. This question was asked to ascertain the extent of direct experience of other countries and, possibly, the effect this might have on the way in which international social work was viewed. The US and UK are both used to playing international roles, currently or historically as imperialists, but they also have strong elements of isolationism – the one as a continental power with only one non-English speaking neighbor and a population with a low ownership of passports, and the other as an island nation suspicious over the centuries of its neighbors as potential invaders. Georgia is a much smaller nation, and used to accommodating to its more powerful neighbors over the centuries, Persia, Turkey, and Russia, having being absorbed into the Soviet empire for much of the last century.

There was a striking difference between the sites in terms of the experience of living abroad: 53 percent of the American students, 30 percent of the British students and just 15 percent of the Georgians. Some of these differences could be explained by the differences in the mean age of each sample, as described earlier, so that the American students had, on average, 10 more years' life experience than their Georgian counterparts. Economic opportunity was also a probable explanation. Europe, South America, and Israel predominate for the American students, whereas African countries were the most prevalent for the British. For the few Georgian students, the neighboring countries of Russia and Turkey predominate; unlike the American and British students who were likely to have lived abroad as independent adults, the Georgian students' youth means that they were probably schooled abroad or lived abroad with their parents. Additionally, the high percentage of HCSSW who lived abroad could be a reflection of a considerable number of students from immigrant families among the student body. While to some students living abroad could mean temporary stays in another country (i.e. participation in a study abroad program, travel, etc.), to others it could also mean living in their country of origin.

Approximately one in seven of the British students had worked or volunteered abroad and just over one in four of the Americans. The nature of the work was very broad; apart from singular instances of banking, accounting, the military, and the science industry, the nature of the work was connected to the general mission of social work, such as humanitarian work, working with street children, etc. None of the Georgians had worked abroad, unsurprising given their youth.

International social work: Knowledge, importance, and interest

While all students at the Bachelor level (British and Georgians) had not undertaken any courses in international social work other than the one they had currently enrolled in, 13 percent of the American Master's students had taken such course (out of these, 80% took it as part of their graduate studies at Hunter College).

All respondents were asked to rate their current knowledge of international social work, how important it was for social work students to learn about international social work, and how much they wanted to learn about international social work. Students at all three sites used the same seven-point Likert scale ('1' equaling 'not knowledgeable at all' and '7' – 'very knowledgeable') to make a self-assessment of their *current knowledge of international social work*. The mean for the US cohort was 2.57, for the UK $M = 3.68$, and for Georgian students $M = 4.05$. Those American students who had already undertaken a class in international social work rated themselves more knowledgeable than those in the same cohort who had not; this might seem an obvious outcome, but it is of course possible that increased knowledge can, in fact, lead to awareness of the extent of what is *not* known. This might account for the fact that the least experienced cohort of students (the Georgians) rated themselves as the most knowledgeable in this field. Compliance factors might also be at play, with Georgian and British students completing their questionnaires within the auspices of the classroom.

For those eager to support the study of international social work, the findings from the questions relating to the *importance for social work students to learn about international social work* (HCSSW $M = 5.60$; SHU $M = 6.08$, TSU $M = 6.47$) and student *motivation to learn* about it (HCSSW $M = 5.65$; SHU $M = 5.84$, TSU $M = 6.13$) were encouraging from all three sites. In each case the highest means were recorded with the Georgian students and the lowest with the Americans, but the scores at all three sites were strong and the mean never fell below 5.6.

Definition of international social work

Students were asked, if they were to *describe international social work* to friends who were not social workers, how they would describe it? There seemed to be two major dimensions through which these definitions could be viewed: one was the historical view (almost exclusively amongst the Georgian cohort) and the other was based on content. However, this latter fractured into many dimensions, too, especially between those who focused on international social work as a local concern (working with people from different countries) or a global concern (addressing worldwide social problems, humanitarian issues, and welfare policies in different parts of the world). A few had a combined view:

I think of it in two ways – doing social work outside the US with non-American clients/communities or practicing social work in the US with a focus on human rights and social development with either immigrants/refugees or with international organizations. (HCSSW student)

There was an emphasis in the British cohort, on the *differences* rather than potential similarities in international social work and the opportunity to learn about your own social work by contrasting with others. Differences were mentioned far more frequently than similarities – by a ratio of approximately 8:1. Students referred to the value of learning/understanding/gaining knowledge in equal numbers to those who mentioned using this knowledge in their work/practice and the impact on the social work role. An evident theme was how international issues affected the UK and, to a lesser extent, other countries and ‘vulnerable people’.

The Georgian cohort placed an emphasis on the historic development of the social work profession. One student summarized it in the following way:

The course in international social work is about the formation of the social worker’s profession, about how it developed from its occurrence to the present days, and the trends and experience in international social work.

Both Georgian and American students discussed international social work in the context of similarities in problems across countries and interdependence. Their responses conveyed themes such as ‘sharing other countries’ experience to solve common social problems’; ‘unity of the social work global values, ethical principles and professional standards’; and “carrying out social work practice to solve the problems pertinent to

international (interstate) relations and problems related to immigration, trafficking, refugees, etc.’. One of the American students said:

International social work involves the application of social work practice to problems occurring on an international or global scale; such as addressing global health or social crises; cross-cultural communication and integration; and international social policy.

Finally, a number of students also saw international social work as a way to connect the profession globally. They saw it as a mass communication between social workers within different countries.

Country-specific aspects of social work

Students were asked whether there were any aspects of social work that were specific just to their country and if yes, to identify them. There were marked contrasts between the British social work students, who by a margin of two to one did not think that there were aspects of social work that were specific to their country, and the American and Georgian students, who were roughly equally divided on the question, though a marked minority of Georgian students (almost one in five) could not say. It was difficult to know how this difference could be explained.

The American and British samples emphasized laws and social policies. Race, class, and gender inequalities were the next feature of the American sample; and specific issues such as family violence were highlighted as specific to Georgia by Georgian students. It was possible that the question was interpreted rather differently, both *across* the cohorts and *within* them. For example, the British students seemed to have felt most strongly that all social problems had an international dimension and, therefore, that there were none that could be said to be specifically British. The Georgian students seemed to have considered the *priorities* for social work and how there might be a specifically *Georgian* hierarchy of social problems. The race, class, and gender inequalities exposed by the American students were surely also a universal feature, but perhaps these students were recognizing the unique nature of racism, sexism, and poverty in different cultures.

Relating this discussion to broader notions of national identity, it was likely that the Georgian and American students had a clearer sense of national identity than the British ones, where notions of ‘Englishness’, ‘Britishness’ and the like are contested and controversial.

Table 3. Topics in international social work.

Highest ranked	HCSSW-USA	SHU-UK	TSU-Georgia
	Violence against women	People trafficking	Violence against women
	People trafficking	Asylum seekers	Street children
	Refugees, immigration	Street children	People trafficking
	Street children	Violence against women	Homelessness
	HIV/AIDS	Refugees	Refugees
	Homelessness	Homelessness	Asylum seekers
	Mental health	Mental health	HIV/AIDS
	Comparative social work	HIV/AIDS	Mental health
	Asylum seekers	Comparative social work	Comparative social work
	War-related issues	Drug trade and alcohol misuse	Drug addiction
	Environmental causes and degradation	Poverty, fair trade	People with disabilities
	Globalization and industrialization	Politics, corruption	Other
	Global sex trade	People with disabilities	
	Poverty, political economy	Other	
	Human rights and violations		
	Child maltreatment		
	Drug trafficking		
	People with disabilities		
	Other		
Lowest ranked			

Topics in international social work

The researchers supplied a pre-determined list of nine topics that could be offered in a course of international social work and asked the respondents to rank their importance. They could have asked an open question and seen how many of these topics were mentioned without prompt, but they felt that there would be considerable duplication in the responses and that the more interesting findings would be to ask students to rank in priority order.

There were considerable differences within each cohort, so the list of rankings recorded here for the three samples is a composite of varying responses (Table 3). The figures following each category gave an indication of the 'distance' between categories: for example, 'violence against women' and 'people trafficking' came out very closely as first and second ranked in the US cohort, compared to the third ranked item, 'refugees'.

Violence against women was ranked highest in two sites and fourth in the third. People trafficking was ranked high (first, second and third) as was the topic of street children (second, third, and fourth). Asylum seekers was the category with the widest differences in ranking (second, sixth, and ninth). Comparative social work ranked very low in all three sites, as did mental health.

Given the earlier findings that the Georgian students were generally more confident in their self-assessment than the Americans (with the British midway between), it is interesting that the American cohort was more forthcoming with additional items (36% responded with additional topics) than the Georgians (20%), and the British again roughly midway with 27 percent adding fresh topics. Only drug addiction/trafficking and disabilities were mentioned additionally across all three sites. Poverty, political economy/fair trade/politics and abuse were mentioned in two of the sites.

Differences and challenges practicing social work abroad

Students were asked to identify the perceived biggest challenges and differences if they moved to another country to practice social work. There was consistency across the three sites in the identification of the five most likely differences and potential challenges of practicing abroad: language barriers, cultural norms, resources, and understanding different systems and legal frameworks were frequently mentioned. However, with hindsight, it would have been better not to have given prompts as these undoubtedly influenced the respondents.

It was more illuminating when the broad notions of language, culture, and resources were expanded, the detail revealing that the same word might hide very different interpretations from student to student (as much within the cohort as across cohorts). This was important because it was exactly this kind of misunderstanding – using a word in common and therefore assuming that the meaning behind the word was also shared – that can pose difficulties in cross-national social work.

Because of the prevalence of the prompted categories, it was the additional topics that perhaps provided the most interest. For instance, religious differences were noted by 12 percent of Georgian students and, to a lesser extent, by the other two cohorts: however, to some respondents, religious differences

might have been subsumed under the broader category of cultural differences. The importance of family and friendship support were broadly noted and the challenge of working without these immediately to hand. A notion that the researchers categorized as 'personal adaptation' seemed to be provide evidence of those students who were better able to put themselves in the position of practicing social work abroad. One might infer that these students will make the best social workers as they demonstrate a capacity for empathy.

Some students saw the challenges in a more political context – the impact of coming from a relatively privileged nation in the case of the US and UK, with apprehension about how the national foreign policy influences foreigners' perceptions. For example, a significant number of US respondents showed a concern about being perceived differently as a result of 'the privilege that comes with being an American citizen'. Students talked about 'misunderstandings' and 'how they as white social workers would be viewed'. They defined this challenge as 'the emotional and political obstacles of being "the white American" and having to reconcile with how that plays out in your work' and thus 'establishing myself as an outsider'. Similarly, a UK student considered the possibility of hostile perceptions of her based on the impact of UK foreign policy.

Georgian students carry less of this international baggage, certainly outside their region, but their relative life inexperience (as a younger cohort than the US and UK) is perhaps reflected in the fact that 15 percent could not name the difficulties and challenges.

Usefulness of international social work for professional and personal development

Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of learning about international social work for their professional and personal development on a scale of 1 to 7, '1' being 'not useful at all' and '7' being 'extremely useful'.

It was encouraging that all three sites recorded high mean ratings for the usefulness of international social work. In terms of *professional development* this was particularly strong in the Georgian cohort ($M = 6.49$), followed by British ($M = 5.80$) and American cohorts ($M = 5.54$); and in terms of *personal development* there was a remarkably consistent, and high, mean across all three sites (US $M = 5.81$; UK $M = 5.98$; Georgia $M = 5.84$).

The figures need to be tempered by the understanding that those who responded to the survey were likely to be those who were most enthusiastic about international social work. Even so, relatively high response rates and the exceptionally high means gave a clear indication of students' regard for a topic area that we might have found to be viewed as a marginal and special interest.

Networking with foreign social work students

Students were asked to rate their interest in communicating with social work students in other countries. Their interest was very high, with mean ratings touching or very near to 6.00 on a scale of 1 to 7. Although the full scale was used by the US and UK cohorts, numbers recording 1, 2 or 3 were very low; in the Georgian ($M = 6.00$) sample there was no rating less than '4' (the middle of the scale).

The responses of the British ($M = 5.89$) and American ($M = 5.79$) students fell into similar categories, principally gaining better knowledge, understanding other perspectives and the notion of a contrast thesis – that a better insight into one's own practice can be gained by exposure to other, foreign practices. As one US student said, 'It's always beneficial to learn how other social work students operate, what they are taught. . . in order to compare to our own and learn.' Another one added,

I think it would be useful to understand what a social worker looks like in that country and what people generally consider social work. It would be useful to understand how social work students are prepared for their future and the types of work they are engaging in other countries. (HCSSW student)

Curiosity about how others 'do social work' was linked to this notion, too, with the suggestion that there were commonalities in the problems that social workers work with worldwide and that it was interesting to learn from how others work with these problems, possibly in very different ways. In this context, one student explained, 'since we are all interconnected, it would be a great learning experience to see how peers deal with many of the same presenting issues'. One interesting reflection among the opportunities for mutual and reciprocal learning was the opportunity for a dialogue: 'Communication with student-peers would give me a new perspective on solutions that global social workers from various countries use to similar or new issues/concerns' (HCSSW student). This might have been also implicit in the benefits of 'hands-on', direct contact referred to by 10 percent of the UK and 7 percent of the US samples.

A minority interest, but nevertheless an interesting one, was the opportunity to learn about the *student* experience from foreign students and to create a network of social work students to campaign for social justice. The creation of an international community of social work students was brought up a number of times by the respondents across all cohorts.

The Georgian students' responses were rather different, although one could interpret 'awareness of cultural differences' as similar to 'gaining better knowledge'. The Georgian sample tended to focus on the professional and the educational rather than personal or student concerns.

Discussion

This collaborative project examined students' perceptions of international social work in the United States, United Kingdom, and the Republic of Georgia. The study compared perceptions and the degrees to which social work students valued learning about international social work.

As study findings revealed, the importance of international social work and student motivation to learn about it were highly encouraging from all three sites. The enthusiasm appeared to be stimulated by a desire to understand more about what and how others 'do social work' abroad, learn new perspectives, and exchange knowledge and experiences. Respondents frequently indicated that studying international social work would offer potential solutions or alternative approaches from other countries, suggesting that there were commonalities in the problems that social workers dealt with worldwide and that it was interesting to learn how others worked with these problems, possibly in very different ways.

The concept of interconnectedness was emphasized a number of times when discussing the types of knowledge that students were interested in gaining. Respondents expressed a strong interest in understanding how the entire global system worked together and affected people all over the world, the reasons why global events and policies had an impact on their practice, even if they practiced locally, and the interconnectedness of humanity in a quest for social justice. Moreover, students were interested in learning about and finding more culturally appropriate methods for responding to the needs of those whose values, cultures, social norms, and traditions were different from their own.

The study results demonstrated that international social work was not considered to be marginal or a specialist interest. The respondents' ratings of the significance of international social work for their professional and their personal development produced very high means, consistently across all three sites. These findings were consistent with those of Saito and Johns (2009) and Lindsey (2005) regarding international social work enhancing students' professional development.

Perhaps one of the most strikingly positive findings was the overwhelming number of students who expressed interest in having communication with students in other countries. This finding emphasized the need for creating networks of international students. Suggestions would be to organize international social work student alliances at each university, use Facebook, Moodle, and/or other social networking tools to connect these interested groups to each other, employ Skype or other teleconferencing methods to conduct meetings and discussions with students across countries. These

strategies can be easily embedded into the curriculum of international social work.

While some suggestions are easier and faster to implement than others, the fundamental first step of this project was to identify how open social work students in various countries were to learning about and from international experiences. The project funding provided by IASSW brought faculty members from three social work schools in three different countries together and encouraged collaboration. Using this as a starting point, the collaborating schools in this project will continue to establish and expand partnerships and networks among students across countries as well as faculty members.

It should be noted that with hindsight, there may be some limitations in the design of the survey questions. Some of the prompts used in the survey should have been excluded as they had too much influence on the responses (for example, the five biggest challenges of working abroad). Additionally, it would have been useful to have asked the respondents their nationality, more particularly in the US and UK samples, where 'your own country' was not necessarily the domicile country.

There may also be limitations to the representativeness of the data. It is difficult to know to what extent these particular sites reflected general national characteristics or were particular to the site. Undoubtedly, the responses were likely to have come from those students more interested and probably more favorably disposed to international social work, so this might favor positive responses. To avoid any 'contamination' of knowledge from students' current experience of the course, the authors made an effort to survey students in the first week of classes. In order to be able to understand the extent to which these findings reflect more than the specific sites under study, it would be useful to replicate the study (with minor amendments in the light of this experience) in further sites, especially those without an existing emphasis on international social work.

Nonetheless, the study produced results that would be helpful to faculty in understanding similarities and differences in students' perceptions and designing or modifying courses accordingly to enhance students' learning. The findings of this study suggest that social work education needs to be globalized to meet students' needs.

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