

Social Work Students “Shine a Light” on Student Affairs Careers

Heather Morris, MSW
Marlene Pomrenke, PhD
University of Manitoba



Background¹

- ▶ 2008 Research:
 - Completed survey of social workers in Student Affairs career positions
 - Examined how they use their social work education/skills in Student Affairs, and the challenges and benefits of their background for their current careers
 - Results showed these two areas are an excellent fit (i.e., skills and values are applicable to both)
 - Some challenges, and many benefits identified

Background² (Cont'd)

- ▶ Research relating social work to post-secondary education careers tends to be about the traditional counseling role and not on student affairs generally as a career area.
- ▶ Much of the career research is outdated or non-existent.
- ▶ This research will help to fill gaps in the literature.

Research Questions

- ▶ How do social work students learn about career opportunities in their field?
- ▶ What do social work students know about career opportunities in student affairs and services (SAS) at the post-secondary level?
- ▶ How can these career opportunities be promoted among social work students?

Methodology & Data Collection

- ▶ With funding from CUCCA (division of CACUSS) a qualitative study was conducted in 2009-2010
- ▶ Three phases of data collection:
 - **Focus Group:** social work students at University of Manitoba (to help refine questions for survey)
 - **On-line survey:** social work students* across Canada
 - **Individual interviews** with social work students at U of M (to enrich survey data with rich narratives)

* Survey was also open to recent graduates of social work programs

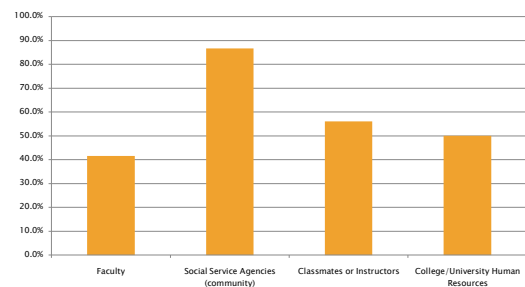
Demographics (phases 1 & 2)

- ▶ 3 focus group participants
- ▶ 90 respondents to the on-line survey
- ▶ Majority were:
 - Current students (87% of survey respondents)
 - In or had completed BSW (60%)
 - Under 40 years of age (76%) and female (90%)
 - Not currently employed in a social work field (60%)
 - Of those employed, only 2 were employed in post-secondary, in academic/research positions

How social work students learn about career opportunities

- 'Word of mouth'- talking to peers, instructors, people from agencies, field supervisors
- Field information days, job fairs
- Emails, website, job boards, field resource booklet
- Courses-guest speakers/presenters, instructors, assignments

Where social work students conduct job searches



Job Searches (continued)

- ▶ “Other” methods for job searches included:
 - Government websites
 - Health authority websites
 - General career/job posting websites/job banks
 - Newspaper
 - Community meetings/job fairs
 - Networking

Student Suggestions for Faculties of Social Work

- ▶ Students felt they could be made aware of careers/jobs in the following ways:
 - Specific classes on job searches
 - Have mentors or recent grad’s talk about their job search experiences, what they are doing now
 - Send emails to students with diverse job postings
 - Have a central website (for social work students) where job postings could be listed
 - Better connections between faculties and agencies to allow cross promotion (i.e., students and jobs)

Survey Results Specific to Student Affairs/Services (SAS)

- ▶ 88% of students had heard of ‘student affairs’ or ‘student services’ at their university
- ▶ 39% indicated they would consider looking for employment at a university/college
- ▶ To look for jobs in this area- would need to know:
 - Where to find job postings
 - What the qualifications are
 - Consider going to website, or have information sent to them about job postings

Applying for a SAS job

- ▶ Understanding of post-secondary jobs
 - Many students assumed that any postings at a college/university would be for teaching positions
 - Therefore, they would not be qualified for any positions unless they had a Ph.D. or possibly Masters
- ▶ Lack of understanding of careers available at post-secondary deters students from seeking out job opportunities- including student affairs or services positions- which are also posted here

Responses to Sample SAS Jobs

- ▶ Search of job postings from post-secondary SAS yielded 3 examples in which a social work degree or related degree was specified:
 - Enrollment and Services Advisor
 - Learning Communities and First Year Programs Coordinator
 - Manager, Off Campus Living
- ▶ Between 88%- 92% of respondents indicated they would consider applying for these jobs

- Those who indicated they would **not** consider applying, gave reasons such as:
 - Not interested in that area
 - Not interested in that population (i.e., young adult)
 - Not enough details provided (note: only title was given)
- ▶ Comment: “not your regular ‘social work’ job title”
 - Highlights importance of promoting non-traditional social work career areas, otherwise, many will not even explore certain job positions further based on title

Summary

- ▶ Although most students had heard about SAS at their college or university, very few knew of career opportunities at post-secondary and/or SAS
- ▶ Many misunderstood what opportunities existed in this area, and therefore, felt they would not be qualified to even seek out these positions
- ▶ When presented with example jobs from SAS, the large majority indicated they would consider applying for those positions
- ▶ Students are interested to know the diversity and variety of career areas outside the ‘traditional’ social work fields

Implications

- ▶ Students would welcome information about career areas in SAS, and would consider applying to these jobs
- ▶ SAS can use this information to promote/advertise jobs among social work students
- ▶ Opportunities for career centres at post-secondary to provide services and resources for SW students
- ▶ Opportunities for collaboration among social work and student affairs and services to cross-promote

Future Directions

- ▶ Currently completing phase 3 of data collection; individual interviews
 - to supplement data, gain an in-depth perspective on research questions through a narrative approach
- ▶ Creation of a career data base
- ▶ Others?

References

1. Pomrenke, M. & Morris, H. (Fall 2009). The Fit Between the Profession of Social Work and Student Affairs. *Communique*, 10 (1), p. 26-27.
2. Morris, H. & Pomrenke, M. (2009, June). *Social Workers and Student Affairs: Experiences of Canadian Colleagues*. Presented at Canadian Association of College and University Student Services conference, Waterloo, ON.