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IN SEARCH OF THE CONTINUUM: GRADUATE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF BSW AND NON-BSW DEGREE HOLDERS

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Do students with prior academic preparation in social work perform better in graduate school than students who do not have a BSW? Master's students in a southeastern school of social work were surveyed about their background, general psychosocial adjustment, adjustment to and attitudes toward graduate school, and graduate academic performance. Forced-entry multiple regression was used to control simultaneously for the effect of background and adjustment factors on four outcome variables: Grade Point Average in the most recent semesters; Stress as a Student; Educational Program Satisfaction; and Professional Social Work Commitment. Having a BSW was unrelated to Educational Program Satisfaction and Professional Social Work Commitment. Among first-year students but not second-year students, possession of a BSW was related to lower GPA in the preceding semester (even with undergraduate GPA controlled). Among second-year students, being a BSW in an advanced standing program was related to greater Stress as a Student but not to GPA. The results suggest that BSWs do not perform better in graduate social work education than non-BSWs.

INTRODUCTION

While the linkage between undergraduate and graduate social work education has concerned the profession since the 1959 Council on Social Work Education Self Study¹, the con-

vergence of three significant forces during the past decade and a half has served to catapult the continuum into the forefront of social work education's planning for the 1980's and beyond. The first force was the evolving recognition of the BSW curriculum, culminating in the 1974 accreditation standards². At present, over 367 such programs have been accredited³. The second force was the provision of "advanced standing" in MSW programs, thereby permitting BSW graduates to be waived out of that portion of the MSW curriculum deemed repetitive of their undergraduate studies⁴. At present, over 71 percent of the 87 MSW programs offer advanced standing for selected BSW graduates⁵. The third and final force was the evolution of the 1969 graduate curriculum policy guidelines towards more structured and standardized curricular requirements⁶ – in part as an effort to respond to the previous two factors.

As a result of these forces, the profession struggles with the vertical continuity of curriculum across degree levels and with defining the differential outcomes expected of graduates from these degree level programs. Perhaps the most significant tension point is the professional foundation curriculum which is to precede more specialized or concentrated studies. Do the profession's vast parameters of service delivery lend themselves to a reducible, common curriculum that social work educators can agree to, much less feasibly and rationally incorporate within the curriculum space available?⁷ If agreement can be reached, can it be maintained as educators move from general or global abstractions to concrete curriculum content area choices?⁸ At present, the MSW professional foundation curriculum clearly mirrors the most recent BSW curriculum standards. Masters' programs are in essence required to respond to at least three presumably different cohorts of entering students: first year students with BSWs, first year students without BSWs, and BSWs entering the second year directly, with "advanced standing". The arrangement presumes that students with a BSW base are, in fact, better prepared for graduate social work education than are those who have been exposed to undergraduate curricula

in other disciplines. The limited data base available, primarily from evaluations of advanced standing programs⁹, suggests reason for skepticism regarding such a presumption.

The present study, therefore, explores the question of the differential backgrounds, competencies, and performance levels of BSWs and non-BSWs in the first and second years of graduate social work studies. The study uses traditional measures of educational impact (academic gradepoint average and satisfaction with curriculum), a variety of psychosocial adjustment factors, and demographic background data to address two related questions. First, are there differences in the adjustment and performance level of BSWs and non-BSWs during graduate study? And, second, can variations in these levels of functioning and performance be predicted from the student's undergraduate major or are other factors more important?

METHODOLOGY

The Samples

To get a sample large enough to permit comparisons of BSW with non-BSW graduate students in the first as well as the second year of graduate (MSW) education, questionnaires were distributed for two successive years to all full-time MSW degree-seeking students attending the School of Social Work of Virginia Commonwealth University. During March of 1982 and again in March of 1983, questionnaires were distributed through classrooms and student mailboxes. Students in two of the authors' first-year classes were responsible for follow-up by telephone and personal contact. Return rates were exceptionally high for both years. One hundred and sixty-nine (77.5%) of the 218 enrolled full-time students responded to the 1982 survey, while 156 (74.6%) returned questionnaires in 1983. Comparison to demographic characteristics of all enrolled full-time students indicated that the respondents were similar on gender, age, and race. In both years, the first-year students were slightly over-represented (45% of the sample in 1982 compared to 39% of the enrolled students, 34% in 1983 compared to 27% enrolled). The data

from the two administrations were merged to form a sample of 128 first-year students and 197 second year students.¹⁰

Measures

In addition to an array of measures reflecting various dimensions of the dependent variable *educational outcome*, the questionnaire also included items which assessed both *background* and *psychosocial adjustment* factors, the study's two groups of predictor variables. Measurement of the seven background factors was straightforward; a series of single items assessed each student's age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, previous social service experience, undergraduate degree and overall undergraduate grade point average.

Measurement of the second group of predictor variables, psychosocial adjustment, was more complex. Four self-rating instruments originally developed by Campbell, Converse and Rodgers¹¹ were adapted to obtain one general and three more specific measures of the students' psychosocial adjustment. The adaptation involved using Campbell, Converse and Rodgers' wording and response categories but replacing their referent "these days." Instead, students were asked to consider the six month period of time from the beginning of the academic year (September) through the time of the survey (March).

Overall psychological well-being was measured with the Index of Well-Being, a nine item scale reflecting affect balance and life satisfaction. Eight polar descriptors (e.g., boring-interesting, useless-worthwhile, disappointing-rewarding, etc.) were at the extremities of seven point scales measuring affect balance. An additional seven point item (completely satisfied - completely dissatisfied) measured the students' life satisfaction. Reliability for the composite Index of Well-Being was well within acceptable limits ($Alpha = .89$).

The more specific psychosocial adjustment measures, Locus of Control, Self-esteem, and General Stress, were also summated rating scales. Individual items for each scale asked respondents to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement with statements (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly dis-

agree). The Locus of Control scale included six items which addressed the degree to which the students successfully execute their plans, achieve their goals, perceive life problems as "too big", etc. Higher scores indicate a greater sense of internal control over life. Self-esteem was measured by four items which reflected students' respect for and valuing of their own personal capacities and qualities. Higher scores indicate greater Self-esteem. The General Stress scale included five items on students' feelings of being frightened, rushed, enjoying life, and worrying about emotional problems and money, with higher scores indicating more stress. Estimates of internal consistency for each of the three indicators of psychosocial adjustment were low (*Alphas* were .59 for both Self-esteem and Locus of Control and .55 for General Stress), but the scales were retained because of their wide acceptance and use in research on quality of life.¹²

The final group of indicators, those measuring the students' educational outcomes, reflect a rather broad conception of the graduate school experience. In addition to each student's recent grade point average (calculated from students' reports of grades received and preceding semester completed), scales measuring program satisfaction, school-specific stress, and professional identity were included in the questionnaire.

The scales measuring Program Satisfaction and Stress as a Student were developed and constructed by the middle author and his students. Program Satisfaction included twelve items rated on a seven-point scale from "Completely Satisfied" to "Completely Dissatisfied", with higher scores indicating more satisfaction. Items included satisfaction with classes and the field as well as with "student life," with the school's administration, and with travel to field agencies. Internal consistency for the Index of Program Satisfaction was .78 (*Alpha*).

The Stress as a Student Scale included ten stressors specifically associated with the graduate student role. These stressors also were measured on a seven point scale, from "always worry about" to "never worry about". They in-

cluded the amount and difficulty of the academic work, grades received, and personal interaction with both faculty and students ($Alpha = .81$).

Finally, the scale measuring Professional Identity was comprised of three statements which elicited students' degree of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with feeling they were in graduate school primarily to develop professional knowledge and skill, feeling their values were consistent with those of the social work profession, and whether they hoped to make a significant contribution within the field ($Alpha = .66$).

RESULTS FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

Descriptors

Background Characteristics. Because some second year students were surveyed twice, once as first- and again as second-year students, the data from first and second-year students were analyzed separately. Of the first year students, 105 (82%) did not have a bachelor's degree in social work and 23 (18%) possessed a BSW but chose to enroll in the normal two-year MSW program, presumably repeating foundation content. As Table I indicates, the two groups were fairly similar on age, race, gender, marital status, and previous years of social work experience. However, the BSW students had a significantly lower overall undergraduate grade point average. Since some of the BSW-degree holders were refused admission to the advanced standing program because of low GPAs,¹³ this finding is not unexpected.

Psychosocial Adjustment. Table I also indicates the first-year students' average scores on the indicators of psychosocial adjustment. There were no significant differences between those with and those without BSW degrees. Students scored moderately but not extremely high on the Index of Well-Being, falling somewhat below the national average (in a recent Campbell, Converse and Rodgers' study the means for a random sample of U.S. adults was 11.8).¹⁴ The students were slightly more internal than external on Locus of Control

TABLE I
 BACKGROUND FACTORS, PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT
 AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME
 FOR FIRST-YEAR MSW STUDENTS

Background	NON-BSW		BSW	
	(n-105) Mean	SD	(n-23) Mean	Sd
Age (years)	27.7	5.3	27.0	5.4
Undergrad GPA	3.2	.4	2.9	.4
Social Work experience (yrs.)	2.2	3.2	2.0	3.0
No courses currently enrolled in ^b	4.7	.7	4.9	.3
	Percents		Percents	
Female	80.1		78.3	
Minority	8.6		21.7	
Single	74.0		69.6	
PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT				
Well-Being	10.7	2.0	10.5	2.2
General Stress (high-more stress)	19.3	5.5	21.3	5.8
Locus of Control (high-internal)	28.3	5.6	28.2	4.3
Self-Esteem	21.8	4.1	20.7	3.2
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME				
Stress as Student	35.3	9.6	37.1	8.1
Program Satisfaction	56.3	10.1	55.2	6.9
Professional Identity	18.3	2.7	18.1	3.2
GPA in Last Semester	3.6	.3	3.2 ^a	.4

^ap less than .05. Tests of significance were t-test of difference of means and chi-square

^bProbability between .051 and .10.

(midpoint = 24.0), had moderately high Self-esteem (midpoint = 16), and were at the midpoint of General Stress (midpoint = 20).

Educational Outcome. On the indicators of educational outcome (Table I), BSW and non-BSW students were similar on three of four measures. They were somewhat lower than the midpoint (40) on Stress experienced in the student role, mildly satisfied with their overall graduate educational program (midpoint = 48), and were strongly committed to the social work profession (midpoint of Professional Identity = 12). Consistent with their poorer undergraduate GPA, the BSW students had a significantly lower mean grade point average in their first semester of graduate school than the non-BSW students.

Predictors of Educational Outcome

Each of the educational outcome variables, Stress as a Student, Program Satisfaction, Professional Identity, and GPA in Previous Semester, was used as a dependent variable in a multiple regression equation. The selected background variables were entered first as a group, followed by the psychosocial adjustment variables as a group.¹⁵ Tables II and III give the regression results, with the adjusted R^2 for the background variables only, the adjusted R^2 with all variables entered, and the slopes and beta weights or relative contribution of each variable when *all* variables are entered simultaneously. Adjusted R^2 takes into account the number of independent variables in the equation; if newly-added variables do not increase the amount of variance explained, the adjusted R^2 will decrease, as happened here with Professional Identity.

For Stress as a Student (Table II), the background factors as a group were poor predictors, accounting for a non-significant 1 percent of variance in Stress. When the psychosocial factors were entered, both the adjusted R^2 (.44) and the change in adjusted R^2 (greater amount of variance predicted) were significant. The important predictors (t , p less than .05) were Self-esteem (greater self-esteem, less stress),

TABLE II
REGRESSION FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS
SLOPES AND BETA WEIGHTS WITH ALL VARIABLES ENTERED

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:	STRESS AS STUDENT (n = 105)		PROGRAM SATISFACTION (n = 102)	
BACKGROUND	BETA	B	BETA	B
Undergrad GPA	.060	.015	-.081	-.017
Race (1-minority)	.028	.795	.018	.392
Yrs. soc. wk. experience	.070	.211	-.099	-.315
Marital Status (1 = married)	.038	.774	.145	3.024
Undergrad. Deg. (1 = BSW in regular program)	-.016	-.366	-.032	-.840
Gender (1 = male)	-.022	-.509	-.052	-1.245
Age in Yrs.	-.208 ^a	-.385	-.107	-.214
Adjusted R ²	adj. R ² = .01		adj. R ² = -.02	
ADJUSTMENT				
Well-Being	-.270 ^a	-1.274	.524 ^a	2.608
General Stress	.259 ^a	.442	-.066	-.107
Locus of Control (high = internal)	-.126	-.213	.076	-.117
Self-Esteem	-.326 ^a	-.738	.053	.137
Adjusted R ² with adjustment variables added	adj. R ² = .44 ^{ab}		adj. R ² = .29 ^{ab}	

^a p less than .05

^b Change in R² when adjustment variables are entered, p less than .05

Well-Being (greater sense of well-being, less stress), General Stress (greater general life stress, greater stress as a student), and Age (younger, less stress). Age, however, was not a predictor until the psychosocial variables were entered (nor was it by itself directly correlated with Stress as a Student), suggesting that it has an effect on Student Stress only when other psychosocial adjustment factors are controlled. Neither having a BSW nor length of social work experience was related to Stress as a Student, i.e., previous exposure to social work education or to social work neither helped nor hindered adaptation to being a first-year graduate social work student.

For Satisfaction with the Educational Program, background factors as a group were again very poor predictors, but the addition of the psychosocial factors increased the predictive power of the equation significantly (adjusted $R^2 = .29$). Well-Being was the only significant predictor, with better affect balance and life satisfaction related to greater program satisfaction. Again, having a BSW and length of previous social work experience, which presumably should influence educational expectations, were unrelated to Satisfaction with the educational experience.

For Professional Identity, neither background nor psychosocial adjustment measures contributed to variation in commitment to social work among first-year students (Table III). Apparently, by the time students enter graduate school, the level of commitment to social work is high regardless of degree and experience, and none of the factors examined systematically influences that commitment.

For the final outcome variable, GPA in the first semester of graduate school, background factors as a group explained 31 percent of the variance, and psychosocial factors did not add to predictive power. The important predictors were length of social work experience (greater experience, higher GPA), undergraduate degree (those *without* a BSW had a higher GPA) and undergraduate GPA (higher undergraduate GPA, higher graduate GPA).

As mentioned earlier, the first-year students with BSW

TABLE III

REGRESSION FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS (CONT.)
SLOPES AND BETA WEIGHTS WITH ALL VARIABLES ENTERED

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:	PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY (n = 170)		GPA LAST SEMESTER (n = 168)	
BACKGROUND	BETA	B	BETA	B
Undergrad GPA	.007	.001	.204a	.208
Race (1-minority)	.119	1.027	-.049	-5.801
Yrs. soc. wk. experience	.067	.060	-.373a	4.657
Marital Status (1 = married)	.032	.200	.048	-4.089
Undergrad. Deg. (1 = BSW in regular program)	-.109	-.766	-.303a	-29.266
Gender (1= male)	-.136	-.936	-.058	-5.480
Age in Yrs.	-.202	-.011	-.092	-.708
Adjusted R ²	adj. R ² = .03		adj. R ² = -.31a	
ADJUSTMENT				
Well-Being	-.062	.087	.096	1.839
General Stress	.136	.069	.131	.917
Locus of Control (high = internal)	.098	.049	.075	.518
Self-Esteem	-.064	-.043	.078	.734
Adjusted R ² with adjustment variables added	adj. R ² = .05		adj. R ² = .31a	

a p less than .05

degrees had lower undergraduate GPAs than non-BSWs; for some, their low GPA may have precluded admission to the advanced standing program. The present analysis, however, suggests that the effects of low undergraduate GPA and hav-

ing a BSW are independent: each by itself relates to lower academic performance in graduate school.

In sum, none of the factors examined predicted Professional Identity among first-year master's students. Stress as a Student was related to general psychosocial adjustment, and Satisfaction with the Educational Program related to general Well-being. Academic performance in the first semester, by contrast, was predicted exclusively by background factors. Having a BSW degree was unrelated to Stress, Program Satisfaction, and Profession Identity, but was related to lower grades in the first semester even with previous academic performance controlled.

RESULTS FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS

Descriptors

Background Data. The second-year MSW respondents included 118 (61%) students without a bachelor's degree in social work, 34 (18%) students with a BSW who had entered the regular two-year MSW program, and 42 (22%) BSW-degree holders who were in the advanced standing program (Table IV). At the university under study, the advanced standing program consists of summer field work and courses followed by direct entry into the second year of the two-year MSW program. The three groups were relatively similar in previous social work experience, and in percent minority, but differed on other background factors. *Post hoc* Duncan multiple comparison procedures indicated that the advanced standing students had higher undergraduate grade point averages and were currently taking a heavier course-load than either the BSW or non-BSW students in the regular two-year program (p less than .05). BSW degree holders in both programs were more likely to be single than non-BSW second-year students, and there tended to be more females and a younger average age among BSW degree holders.

Psychosocial Adjustment. The three groups of second-year students were similar in having moderately high Well-being scores and midpoint General Stress scores and in being

TABLE IV

BACKGROUND FACTORS: PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME FOR SECOND-YEAR MSW STUDENTS

	NON-BSW (n-118)		BSW IN REGU- LAR PROGRAM (n-34)		BSW IN ADV. STAND. PRO. (n-42)	
BACKGROUND	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age (years) ²	29.7	6.1	27.5	5.1	27.9	6.9
Undergrad GPA ¹	3.3	.4	3.2	.7	3.5	.3
Social Work experience (yrs.)	2.9	3.5	3.3	4.2	3.2	6.3
No. courses currently enrolled in ¹	4.7	.5	4.6	.6	5.0	.2
	Percent		Percent		Percent	
Female ²	79.7		91.2		92.9	
Minority	10.2		8.8		4.8	
Single ¹	48.3		61.8		70.7	
PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT						
Well-Being	10.3	2.4	10.2	2.5	9.7	2.1
General Stress (high-more stress)	19.6	4.6	20.8	5.8	21.1	4.6
Locus of Control (high-internal)	29.3	5.4	28.3	4.1	28.4	4.9
Self-Esteem ²	21.6	4.1	20.7	4.0	19.9	4.8
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME						
Stress as Student ¹	30.4	9.5	32.8	8.2	36.3	9.2
Profram Satisfaction ²	54.3	9.9	54.9	8.8	50.7	10.1
Professional Identity	18.5	2.2	18.4	2.0	18.9	2.4
GPA in Last Semester	3.6	.4	3.5	.4	3.5	.6

¹ p less than .05. Tests of significance were analysis of variance and chi-square.

² Probability between .051 and .10.

slightly internal on Locus of Control (Table IV). There was a tendency ($p = .08$) to differ on Self-esteem, with the non-BSW students higher only than the advanced standing students.

Educational Outcome. The three groups were similar on Professional Identity (highly committed) and grade point average for the preceding semester. They tended to differ on Program Satisfaction, with advanced standing students less satisfied than non-BSW second-year students (Duncan's *post hoc*, p less than .05). The analysis of Stress in the Student Role was significant, with advanced standing students experiencing more stress than non-BSW students (Duncan's *post hoc*, $p = .05$). The advanced standing students had been in classes and field throughout the summer whereas the regular-program students could take the summer off or lighten their second-year courseload by taking some summer courses. The extended period of classwork and their current heavier courseload may explain the greater dissatisfaction and stress of advanced standing students.

Predictors of Educational Outcome

As for first-year students, the predictors of educational outcome among second-year students were examined by forced entry of all background and then all psychosocial adjustment variables into four separate multiple regression equations (Tables V and VI).

For Stress as a Student, the background variables as a group explained a significant but small (5%) amount of variation. The addition of psychosocial factors increased with explained variance significantly, to 34 percent. As with first-year students, the major predictors were Self-esteem (higher self-esteem, less stress), General Stress (greater life stress, greater stress as a student), and Well-being (greater well-being, less stress). In addition, gender (males experienced less stress) and status (BSWs in the advanced standing program reported more stress) were predictive of Stress as a Student. Gender was not a significant predictor when only background factors were considered, suggesting it has an effect only once psychosocial adjustment is controlled. While

TABLE V
REGRESSION FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS
SLOPES AND BETA WEIGHTS WITH ALL VARIABLES ENTERED

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:	STRESS AS STUDENTS (n = 167)		PROGRAM SATISFACTION (n = 162)	
BACKGROUND	BETA	B	BETA	B
Undergrad GPA	-.110	-.022	-.002	-.000
Race (1-minority)	.099	3.344	.041	1.389
Yrs. soc. wk. experience	-.049	-.103	-.045	-.099
Marital Status (1 = married)	.106	2.003	.094	1.868
BSW in regular program	.026	.638	.036	.945
Advanced standing	.149a	3.435	-.074	-1.760
Gender (1 = male)	-.135a	-3.432	-.012	-.312
Age in Yrs.	-.002	-.003	-.007	-.012
Adjusted R ²	adj. R ² = .05a		adj. R ² = -.01	
ADJUSTMENT				
Well-Being	-.165a	-.659	.487	2.039
General Stress	.267a	.507	.089	.181
Locus of Control (high = internal)	.005	.010	-.019	-.036
Self-Esteem	.317a	-.690	.045	.105
Adjusted R ² with adjustment variables added	adj. R ² = .34ab		adj. R ² = .18ab	

a p less than .05

b Change in R² when adjustment variables are entered, p less than .05

TABLE VI

REGRESSION FOR SECOND YEAR STUDENTS (CONT.)
SLOPES AND BETA WEIGHTS WITH ALL VARIABLES ENTERED

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:	PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY (n = 170)	GPA LAST SEMESTER (n = 168)		
	BETA	B	BETA	B
BACKGROUND				
Undergrad GPA	.029	.001	.166a	.120
Race (1-minority)	.012	.096	-.065	-7.814
Yrs. soc. wk. experience	.026	.013	.103	.788
Marital Status (1 = married)	.029	.132	.299a	15.856
BSW in regular program	-.026	-.154	.022	1.983
Advanced standing	.123	.666	.064	5.351
Gender (1-male)	-.107	-.645	.071	6.660
Age in Yrs.	-.013	-.005	.044	.244
Adjusted R ²	adj. R ² = -.01		adj. R ² = -.09	
ADJUSTMENT				
Well-Being	.306a	.287	.126	1.831
General Stress	.211a	.095	-.090	-.625
Locus of Control (high = internal)	.202	.077	-.055	-.373
Self-Esteem	.131	.022	-.029	-.230
Adjusted R ² with adjustment variables added	adj. R ¹ = .10ab		adj. R ² = .10a	

a p less than .05

b Change in R² when adjustment variables are entered, less than p .05

advanced standing was a predictor of student stress, having a BSW but entering the second-year through the regular two-year program was not, and the overall contribution of having a BSW was not significant.¹⁶

For Satisfaction with the Educational Program (Table V), background factors as a group explained no variance and the addition of psychosocial adjustment factors increased explanation only to 18 percent. As with first-year students, among second-year students Well-being was the sole major predictor of Educational Satisfaction (greater well-being, greater satisfaction).

For Professional Identity (Table VI), background factors did not explain variance but the addition of psychosocial factors increased the adjusted R^2 to a modest .10. General Well-being (greater well-being, greater professional commitment) and general Stress (more stress, greater commitment) were both significant predictors.

For GPA in the preceding semester, background factors as a group explained 9 percent of variance, and psychosocial adjustment did not increase the predictive power of the equation. The only significant predictors were marital status (married students had better grades) and undergraduate GPA (better undergraduate grades, better graduate grades).

In sum, among second-year master's students, a psychosocial factors were the primary predictors of Stress as a Student, Satisfaction with the graduate program and Professional Commitment, with Well-being and General Stress the most consistent factors. Recent academic performance was predicted by undergraduate academic performance and by being married. However, the amount of variance explained by each equation was extremely modest. BSW students in advanced standing perceived more Stress as a Student, but otherwise neither undergraduate degree nor previous social work experience was related to educational outcome.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that students who enter graduate school without a bachelor's degree in social work do not dif-

fer substantially from those with a BSW and, on *subjective* measures of educational outcome, share similar experiences. Non-BSWs were as satisfied with their educational experience as BSWs and demonstrated comparable commitment to the social work profession. Non-BSWs also experienced the same stress as students with BSWs, despite their presumed lesser familiarity with the role of social work students. The exception, higher stress among BSWs in the advanced standing program, was probably due to the increased demands of the accelerated program; in addition to taking a full course-load through the summer, these students were then placed into second-year classes where they knew no one while their classmates from the regular two-year program had been together for a year. Some also entered directly from BSW programs and thus at the time of the study had had no break from academic coursework for 18 months. The stress, however, did not appear to affect their academic performance.

The major difference between BSWs and non-BSWs was in the area of academic performance. As mentioned, BSWs in the advanced-standing program had higher overall undergraduate grade point averages than BSWs who were not admitted to the advanced standing program, and performed as well in graduate school as other students. But BSWs who entered the regular two-year program as first year students performed poorly as first year students, regardless of undergraduate GPA. Having a BSW and low undergraduate GPA were independently related to poor GPA in the first semester of graduate school. This suggests that admitting students who have already done poorly in undergraduate social work programs to graduate programs is extremely risky for the profession; if graduate GPA is a valid indication of content mastery, they do not master the foundation content even though, presumably, it is a repetition of content they have already had in the bachelor's program.

However, in the second-year of the master's program, having a BSW was *not* related to academic performance. The data currently available cannot explain the difference in impact of degree between first and second year students, but

there are several possibilities. In general, students with low first-year GPAs tend to drop out of the program between first and second year. Conversely, grading standards may have been less rigid in the second year,¹⁷ or students may have all been performing well in their selected areas of interest, since the second-year program is specialized. However, it is also possible that previous social work preparation (BSW, repeating foundation content) and previous academic performance (undergraduate GPA) are unrelated to mastering the advanced content of a second-year master's program.

The school at which the study was completed has made a concerted effort to ensure that its own BSW curriculum content and its first-year MSW foundation content are similar. Hence, one explanation for the first-year BSW's poor performance might be their boredom with redundant content.¹⁸ However, three quarters of BSWs entering the program in the relevant years were *not* from the school's own undergraduate program, but were from a large number of schools with diverse curricula. Consequently, the advanced standing students may not have had the same foundation content on which the second-year curriculum was predicated, a dilemma which faces all Master's schools which do not use equivalency tests in positioning BSW students.¹⁹ However, it is unlikely that this factor—diversity of BSW curricula—explains *both* the poorer academic performance of BSWs in the first-year foundation curriculum *and* the equivalent (to non-BSWs) performance of BSWs in the second-year advanced-level curriculum.

In sum, there is overall no evidence that BSWs perform better in graduate school than students without academic social work preparation. Nor was length of previous social work experience, expected to be an asset for students, related to educational outcomes (except first-year first semester GPA).

In general, background factors were the best predictors of academic performance and psychosocial adjustment factors were the best predictors of subjective outcome (stress in the student role and satisfaction with the educational program).

The latter relationships cannot be interpreted causally; it is moot, for example, if low self-esteem causes high student stress or high stress causes low self-esteem. Clearly, however, students' general adjustment is related to their *perceptions* of their education but not to their performance.

The study is limited to a single school of social work and may well not be representative of others. The findings about stress among advanced standing students, for example, may be due to the idiosyncracies of the particular program. The study is also limited to BSWs who chose to go on to graduate social work education and does not address performance in the job market nor in other types of graduate education.²⁰

Other limitations of the study include the voluntary nature of responses (although the return rate was high), and the inability to identify who completed the questionnaire in successive years (since responses were anonymous), so that we cannot be certain if BSWs who performed poorly in the first year discontinued their graduate education or went on to perform well in the second year. Nevertheless, the study's findings suggest that 1. possession of a BSW degree is not related to better graduate performance not do BSW students with a deficit (low undergraduate GPA) do well in the graduate program's foundation curriculum, and 2. BSW preparation is a less adequate predictor of graduate outcome than other factors such as psychosocial adjustment.

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 8. Michael S. Kolevzon, "Conflict and Change Along the Continuum in Social Work Education," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 20 (Spring 1984); pp. 51-57.
 9. See, for example: Edward J. Mullen and Roger Levin, "Linkage in Undergraduate/Graduate Social Work Education: Interim Research Evaluation" (Fordham University, 1973) mimeograph; James D. Orten, "The Accelerated Program," paper presented at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, Chicago, 1975; Aaron Rosenblatt, Marianne Welter and Sophie Wojchiechowski, *The Adelphi Experiment* (New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1976).
 10. Some of the 1983 second-year students had taken the questionnaire twice, once as first-year students in 1982, a second time as second-year students in 1983. It is possible that their second responses differed because of a "practice effect" or the repetition of the questionnaire a year later. It was not possible to identify which students had taken the questionnaire twice, but the 66 for whom it was possible—second year students in 1983 who had been full-time students the previous year—were compared to the comparable group—1982 second year students who had been full-time first year students the previous year but could not have taken the questionnaire twice because it was not given when they were in their first year. There were no significant differences between the two groups on any variables, suggesting that if there were "practice effects," they were not extensive enough to distort the data presented.
 11. Campbell, Angus, Converse, Philip E. and Rodgers, Willard L. *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations and Satisfaction* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Campbell, Angus. *The Sense of Well-being in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).
 12. The low internal reliabilities of Self-esteem, Locus of Control and General Stress indicate that, for this sample at least, these measures may not tap a single, univariate dimension of esteem, control or stress.
 13. Criteria for admission to advanced standing included possession of a BSW from an accredited school of social work and an undergraduate

GPA of 3.0. Admission to the regular two-year masters' program required an undergraduate GPA of 2.7.

14. Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, *op. cit.*
15. Examination of the zero-order correlations for the possibility of multicollinearity indicates that there are no near-linear relationships among independent variables. The statistical programming used, SPSSX, also tests for non-linear interdependency through examination of the tolerance. All variables entered met the tolerance criterion.
16. To assess the overall contribution of the dummy variables representing degree status, the regression equation was run a second time without Advanced Standing and BSW in the Regular Program; the residual sums of squares of both equations (with and without the dummy variables) were used in an F-test to assess contribution of the dummy variables to variance explained. F was not significant for any of the regressions (Stress as a Student, $F = 2.33$, $df = 2, 165$; Program Satisfaction, $F = .72$, $df = 2, 160$; Professional Identity, $F = 1.45$, $df = 2, 168$; GPA Last Semester, $F = .32$, $df = 2, 166$).
17. Dennis M. Dailey, "The Validity of Admissions Predictions: A Replication Study and Implications for the Future," *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 15 (Spring 1979), pp. 14-22
18. If BSWs repeating foundation content were bored, one might also expect less satisfaction with the educational program. But the BSW students in the first-year were as satisfied as non-BSW students (Table I).
19. William A. Anderson, "Avoiding Redundancy: Advanced Placement in Social Work Education," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 5 (January 1978), pp. 250-262; Hokenstad, *op. cit.* In 1975 only 31 percent of masters programs that permitted advanced standing (to BSWs or open to other students) used qualifying examinations as a basis for advanced standing (Baggett, *op cit.*).
20. A recent study shows that MSWs with a BSW undergraduate degree do not report as much professional achievement *after* graduate school as those with a BA (Harry Specht, Doris Britt and Charles Frost, "Undergraduate Education and Professional Achievement of MSWs," *Social Work* 29 (May-June 1984), pp. 219-223). However, it is possible that BSWs who perform well in post-college employment are less likely to return to graduate school in social work and consequently are not included in such studies of graduate students.