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Assessing the implicit curriculum in social work education: An examination of the University of Northern Iowa students' experiences

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ASSESSING THE IMPLICIT CURRICULUM IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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This Study by: Madison Motz

Entitled: Assessing the Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education: An Examination of the University of Northern Iowa Students' Experiences

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Abstract

As part of a social work program's accreditation process, social work programs across the United States are now being asked to assess their implicit curriculum, defined as the educational environment in which the explicit curriculum is presented, as new evidence has shown that implicit curriculum plays an important role in the learning, development, and professional outcome of social work students. Following the wake of a series of student diversity-related injustices across the state of Iowa, our team set out to create an implicit curriculum survey tool shaped by the experiences, concerns, and feedback presented by students within the social work department. The results showed that students felt that the department needs to make more of an effort to recruit diverse faculty, staff, and students, train faculty to facilitate safe classroom discussions, and design a curriculum that explicitly discusses and addresses issues of oppressed communities.

Assessing the Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education:

An Examination of the University of Northern Iowa Students' Experiences

The purpose of the social work profession is to encourage and advance human and community well-being. All social workers are bound to a code of professional ethics that articulate the values, principles, and ethical standards all social workers must adhere to (NASW Code of Ethics, 2017). Though the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics details its explanation of what is expected of a social work professional, the knowledge and practice of these values and skills in a higher education setting are what truly lays the foundation for success in this field. Because of this, the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) accreditation process strives to assure that the social work courses students complete in order to receive their degree meet specific standards for professional social work education (CSWE Accreditation, 2009). After social work students at the University of Northern Iowa shared personal testimonies in a social media campaign discussing issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion at the university and within the department, our team of social work faculty and students created a survey tool designed to measure the implicit curriculum within our program. Shaped by student experiences and input, the survey received high response rates and served as a baseline for future survey administrations with the hopes that results will improve as our department makes a concerted effort to address student needs and follow through.

Literature Review

In 2008, the CSWE introduced their new Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), which created a new framework for the accreditation of social work education programs and worked to address gaps in both Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) programs across the United States. It named and described four features of integrated

curriculum design: Program mission and goals, explicit curriculum, implicit curriculum, and assessment (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). While the CSWE has long required accredited social work programs to assess their explicit curriculum (the written, tangible plan for learning set by faculty and presented to students in the form of course objectives, handouts, and lecture), the requirement to evaluate the implicit curriculum is a fairly new addition. The EPAS (2008) defined the implicit curriculum as the “educational environment in which the explicit curriculum is presented” (p. 10). It includes admissions policies and procedures, the program’s commitment to diversity, student participation in governance, policies as they relate to advisement, retention, and termination, administrative structure, availability of and types of resources, and faculty (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). In essence, the implicit curriculum in a social work program refers to the attitudes, values, and behaviors that people within the department intentionally or unintentionally convey through policies and practices both in and out of the classroom (Bogo & Wayne, 2013).

Examining the Impact of Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education

The environment in which students receive instruction plays just as important of a role in their learning and development as the actual content that is taught. Because the implicit curriculum positively impacts students’ professional empowerment, it is imperative for social work programs to inform learning and development in a way that aligns with the central values of the profession (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014). To do this effectively, the spirit of inquiry, support for difference and diversity, and values and priorities in the educational environment must be incorporated, both explicitly and implicitly, in a way that meets the CSWE’s accreditation standards (Bogo & Wayne, 2013). As a part of the CSWE’s new EPAS in 2008,

accredited Masters of Social Work (MSW) and Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs were required to examine assessment data and call attention to their implicit curriculum.

The EAPS identified five key components for this assessment that are directly related to a social work program's implicit curriculum. (1) Diversity: CSWE posits that the program's commitment to diversity of all kinds contributes to the implicit curriculum within a program because it is directly reflected in its learning environment (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). The ability of a social work program to create and affirm a respectful, safe learning environment for all of its students is shown through their ability to produce classroom norms, conversations, and student collaboration that is inclusive and respectful of all identities. (2) Student Development: Educational preparation and a student's commitment to social work values are essential. Programs need to have a consistent and transparent process for evaluating applications and informing applicants of their acceptance or rejection; clear policies and procedures in place regarding student advisement, retention, and termination; and student participation in policy changes regarding academic and student affairs (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). (3) Faculty: Faculty qualifications and an appropriate student-faculty ratio are essential when creating an educational environment that teaches the knowledge, values, and skills required of professional social workers. Faculty members' qualifications, competence, expertise, and ability to model the behavior and values of the profession in an educational environment must be evaluated often in order to ensure that they can do so effectively (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). (4) Administrative Structure: Because social work faculty and administrators are best suited to make decisions regarding the delivery of social work education, they should exercise autonomy in designing their administrative and leadership structure, policies, and their

program's curriculum (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008). (5)

Resources: Adequate resources are the final component the EPAS identifies as part of a program's implicit curriculum because they are fundamental to creating, maintaining, and improving an educational environment that supports the development of competent social work practitioners. Programs must provide sufficient financial supports, library resources, support staff, and assistive technology to support the learning and professionalization of their students (CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008).

Literature on Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education

In recent years, survey research and published journal articles offer insight into the implicit curriculum work in social work programs across the country. However, as colleges use a seven-year accreditation cycle and this requirement was only introduced in 2008, quality survey findings are just now being published. Most survey research uses a 7-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) to assess student experience within multiple dimensions of the implicit curriculum. A majority of the publications available today use what is known as an empowerment framework, which examines social work student autonomy and independence to guide their study. One study conceptualized professional empowerment as "identity as a professional social worker, belief in their potential for professional competence, perceptions of autonomy as a professional social worker, and beliefs regarding their ability to have an effect as a social worker" (p. 631). These self-perceptions are crucial in helping professions because they empower students to take actions that can influence organizational and community conditions needed to improve the well-being of their clients (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014).

Findings from these empowerment-focused studies found several correlations between a positive implicit curriculum and professional empowerment. “Sense of community among faculty and students” followed by the “diversity of faculty and staff” had the strongest direct effect on the students’ feelings of professional empowerment (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014). In 2018 Grady, Szick, and Powers examined the psychometric properties of social work implicit curriculum surveys and found that set questions about field placement (required internship experiences, the classroom learning environment, community experience, program diversity, faculty advising, and student support services reliably and accurately assess implicit curriculum (Grady, Szick, & Powers, 2018). Peterson and colleagues' 2014 survey assessed several of these categories and concluded students who experienced both positive school and field placement environments reported the highest levels of professional empowerment out of the four profile groups. Conversely, students who reported negative experiences in both school and field placement had the lowest levels (Peterson, Farmer, Donnelly, & Firenze, 2014). These findings support the necessity of additional supports in the day-to-day interactions between social work faculty, staff, and students to reinforce the explicit curriculum (Bogo & Wayne, 2013).

Context for the Current Study

Rising Tension on University Campuses

Since the summer of 2016, there has been a drastic increase in the number of state and local newspapers across the United States reporting racist incidents that are occurring on university campuses. In their 2016 census of hate groups in the U.S., Southern Poverty Law Center reported a new spike in hate groups formed and hate crimes committed throughout the country (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). In the past five years, college newspapers have

reported an increase of racist incidents including acts of vandalism, spray-painted swastikas and other emblems of hate, and intimidating posters distributed by students on campus. In an attempt to explore the root causes of these incidents and the protests that resulted, one study analyzed the recurrent demands of Black student activists from 73 universities across the U.S. (Ndemanu, 2017). Their results showed that the number one demand Black students had of their university administrators was to increase the number of faculty of color at their university. Other demands raised at over half of the colleges analyzed for the study included creating mandatory diversity training for faculty and staff, increasing the number of students of color attending the university, and requiring a racial and social justice course for all students (Ndemanu, 2017).

Iowa Public Universities

Students across all three of Iowa's public universities, governed by an entity known as the Board of Regents, share similar experiences of racial tension and passivity from their administrators. As the University of Iowa (UI), Iowa State University (ISU), and the University of Northern Iowa's (UNI) student bodies become increasingly diverse, issues around the campus's inability to effectively create a culture that encourages and supports equity and inclusion are more apparent. In 2019, the Board of Regents reported that nearly 16 percent of all UI, ISU, and UNI students identify as racial or ethnic minorities - the highest ever, and up almost 6 percentage points since 2010 (Miller, 2019). As this percentage continues to climb, more students feel empowered to demand administrative attention through the use of protests, social media movements, and the formation of new student groups.

At the University of Iowa, students took to social media in 2019 to pose a question to their fellow classmates: "Does the University of Iowa love me?" Originating on Twitter and Instagram, this movement introduced the hashtag #DoesUIowaLoveMe as a direct response to

the campus's #iloveUIOWA campaign created in celebration of the college's 172nd birthday (Moudy, 2019). The hashtag #DoesUIowaLoveMe was created by a small group of students, staff, and faculty members at the Latino Native American Cultural Center on campus after agreeing that they all felt unsupported by the university. Their social media movement urged students to speak their truth and share their experiences at UI in hopes of drawing attention to the lack of love and support students were feeling (Peckman, 2019). An overwhelming majority of the posts shared with the #DoesUIowaLoveMe hashtag shared personal testimonies of discrimination based on sexual orientation, race, gender, religion, or learning disabilities that occurred on campus (Moudy, 2019). In regards to the #DoesUIowaLoveMe movement, UI President Bruce Harreld posted the following on Twitter: "We respect our students as they communicate their frustrations and at the University of Iowa. We are committed to hearing their concerns and improving our campus climate" (University of Iowa, 2019).

In the months following this social media movement, the University of Iowa set out to release their new "2019-2021 Excellence through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan," a development process that was two years in the making. Just one month after the #DoesUIowaLoveMe hashtag trended, an external review of the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion took place, "ensuring that the organizational structure and programs were appropriately aligned and situated to advance diversity equity, and inclusion at the university" (DEI Action Plan, 2019). The plan outlines goals pertaining to the creation of a permanent inclusive and equitable campus environment; an increase in the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff, and students; the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into UI's core academic mission of teaching, research, and service; and the enhancement of campus-wide

accountability, effectiveness, and collaboration as it pertains to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI Action Plan, 2019).

Despite these written efforts, UI students, faculty, and staff continue to cite acts of discrimination and inaction. In July 2020, diversity committees shared their disappointment and frustration with the university's response to the Black Lives Matter movement following the death of George Floyd. They cited the Dean's poor fielding of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color) students' questions and concerns at a June town hall to be yet another example of how administrators and faculty are ill-equipped at advocating for the needs of BIPOC on campus (Breux, 2020). In January 2021, a group of over 75 students marched from Iowa City's Old Capitol building to the University of Iowa's College of Dentistry, calling for more action on diversity and equity in the college. Dental students in the program said that the College of Dentistry had ignored years of complaints about faculty who specifically targeted marginalized students, and argued that the current atmosphere includes a long-standing tradition of discrimination and bias. Protestors criticized the college's strategic plan and diversity initiatives, stating that the university was far from the welcoming, inclusive, and safe space that UI claims to be (Krejci, 2021).

Shortly after the #DoesUIowaLoveMe movement began at UI, students attending Iowa State University began forming a new campus group called Students Against Racism (SAR) in response to weeks of inaction from administration after a series of anti-Semitic messages were written throughout residence halls and classrooms (Miller, 2019). Students in this group highlighted that the display of racist epithets was not a new problem for Iowa State, recalling that during the 2016 presidential election, ISU police responded to several complaints about the distribution of racist posters and racial slurs being smeared across campus property. Students

Against Racism cited the administration's continual lack of response as a reason for this ongoing problem, and in October of 2019, they submitted a list of 15 demands to administrators (Miller, 2019). Through the use of social media platforms on both Twitter and Facebook, Students Against Racism were able to conjure up enough student support to host a series of "campus conversations" throughout the month of November. These meetings were so well attended that many attendees were without seats and instead stood for the full two hours (ISU Students Against Racism Facebook, 2019).

In their list of demands, SAR not only expressed the needs for administrative action involving the vandalism across campus using racial slurs and anti-Semitic messages but also called for the dismissal of ISU employee and Student Government Advisor Alex Krumm, who posted a photo of himself in blackface on Instagram in 2015 (Foley, 2020). Though Krumm only worked at the school for nine months before the ISU administration called for his resignation following their meeting with SAR, members still expressed concern that Krumm advised dozens of elected and appointed student leaders on campus before his resignation (Foley, 2020). In response, one of SAR's demands called for the firing of future staff who have engaged or are actively engaging in racist or anti-Semitic behavior (SAR Demands, 2019). Other demands called for the expulsion of the students responsible for chalkings of neo-Nazi slogans, the defacement of the Bean House in Geoffroy Hall, and all future students who engage in similar patterns of racism that violate the school's zero-tolerance policy. Unfortunately, ISU's campus police were unable to identify individuals responsible for the neo-Nazi slogans written in chalk on campus sidewalks and chalkboards. ISU administration deferred to the First Amendment, explaining that ISU "cannot punish individuals for having bigoted or hateful thoughts or even expressing bigoted thoughts or hate speech" (SAR Demands, 2019).

One demand that the administration did make headway on was the creation of a student advisory board run by students of color to be included in all decisions made by the campus offices in charge of handling discrimination. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Student Advisory Council was created and student interviews were conducted in September of 2020. All ISU students were eligible to apply, and applications were reviewed by a selection committee consisting of both students and staff from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, as well as the Office of Equal Opportunity (ISU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion SAC). Though many SAR members are happy to see the creation of a student-led advisory committee, they also point out that the very people making decisions on applicants are the ones who remained silent and allowed inaction when issues surrounding diversity have happened in the past.

Just a few months prior in the fall of 2018, University of Northern Iowa BIPOC students and allies began questioning their administration's intentions after they took unprecedented control of a student-run event. Student criticism stemmed from the administration's decision to limit the ticket sales for a Black rap artist's performance on campus to students only after concerns were raised about potential gang member attendance and safety concerns (Calvin, 2019). This move struck students in support of open ticket sales to the public as discriminatory and hypothesized that the administration's end goal was to limit the number of Black concert attendees. The students felt the root concern was the artist's race, rather than the administration's cited safety concerns from unspecified sources within the local police departments. The Waterloo Police Department later released a statement that they were unaware of the origin of the intelligence that UNI administrators said they had received and had not been the source of it (Calvin, 2019).

After an unsuccessful attempt to re-open the concert ticket sales to non-UNI students in the Cedar Valley area, a group of undergraduate BIPOC students and allies met and formed the Racial and Ethnic Coalition (REC) intending to educate and collaborate with UNI administration and student government to meet the needs of BIPOC on campus (REC, 2019). Within the recommended rules of operation for University student groups, REC submitted a list of requests and goals for the campus leadership that included new guidelines on how to report acts of bias, the need for public support of multicultural organizations, and the evaluation and definition of roles for university administration (Rivers, 2019).

The efforts of REC were not well-received by either leadership group. UNI's student government declined to issue a charter to the new campus organization or grant REC official status as an approved organization. In the following months, BIPOC students - even those who did not partake in REC's original stand against UNI administrators - reported experiencing an increase in microaggressions on campus including white students glaring at them, locking car doors in their presence, and instances of faculty and students making targeted comments in class about gang affiliation (Calvin, 2019).

After a year of feeling ignored by administrative officials and student government members, the REC met to develop the #UNIisnotanAlly social media campaign. This campaign was created to uplift the voices of BIPOC at UNI and create a platform where they could share their experiences and expose the racism they had encountered both at UNI and in the larger community (UNIisnotanAlly, 2019). As part of their social media campaign, BIPOC students recorded testimonies about their personal experiences in classes, in interactions with peers, and in interactions with university faculty and staff, sharing the videos on Twitter and Facebook. Students featured in the testimonials included undergraduate students in the Department of

Social Work who highlighted specific concerns within social work classes and between social work students and faculty. Later in the fall of 2019, social work student members of REC also spoke about their negative experiences in UNI's social work program at a campus town hall meeting attended by over 200 students and faculty, with dozens more in attendance via live stream.

In response to the #UNIsnotanAlly movement on campus and the continuous demand for change from BIPOC students and allies on campus, The University of Northern Iowa administration formed a new diversity advising committee called the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Committee, though it consists of mostly staff members with only four student representatives. Though a diversity committee was one of the requests REC raised for UNI administration, several REC members have expressed concerns about the newly formed advisory board. They were quick to point out that the input sessions leading up to the creation of the committee, the nomination process for its current members, and the unclear role of the committee, in general, have led to concerns about the DEI Advisory Committee's ability to make a positive impact on campus (REC's Proposal for the President's Advisory Committee, 2020).

UNI Social Work Department's Response

In response to the REC's social media movement and the student testimonials that raised awareness about incidents within UNI's social work program, the department emailed both undergraduate and graduate social work students to offer support and seek guidance on how to best meet their needs. Two faculty members Rebecca Dickinson and Libby Fry volunteered to begin hosting a series of 'listening posts' as a way for social work students to voice their concerns and ask any department-specific questions that they had. The first listening post occurred in November 2019, just one week after the REC town hall event. Fourteen students

participated, many of whom held identities that have been historically marginalized. The listening post began with a critical discussion about the creation of a group agreement to ensure that the environment would be both productive and safe. The group decided that there would be no audio or video recording during the listening posts, that respect, active listening, and openness would be required of all in attendance, and that the faculty members involved in the listening posts would be committed to following up in what was discussed at each meeting. It was also agreed upon that faculty could take notes so long as no students' names or identifying information would be included and that the notes were made available to students at their request.

During the initial meeting, several students raised questions and concerns regarding various topics within the department, examples of specific incidents that happened to them or their BIPOC peers, and suggestions for how the department could improve going forward. They also identified areas where they felt faculty needed further training to be proficient, including general diversity and inclusion training, how to navigate sensitive conversations in the classroom as it relates to diversity and inclusion, and in receiving critical feedback from BIPOC.

From this meeting, an action plan consisting of seven items was developed. These items pertained to faculty diversity training, inclusive curriculum, communication, syllabi statements, faculty searches, student assessment review, and a statement of support from the department. Following the listening post, a document was created outlining the specific action steps for each item, assigning responsibilities, and setting out a timeline for the accomplishment of each step. The document was shared with all students in the department. This document continues to be updated as progress is made on each of the seven items. Following the initial listening post, three additional meetings were held through the fall and spring semesters to continue the conversation

with students and allow check-ins on the progress being made. Though some meetings have no student attendance and others have seven to ten, it is still an opportunity for students to air their concerns, ask questions, and explore the progress that is being made within the department and find ways to get further involved in it.

Creation of an Implicit Curriculum Survey

Following the positive student feedback that was received as a result of the listening posts and the involvement of students in departmental changes, Dickinson and Fry assembled a team of graduate and undergraduate students to work on instrument development for an implicit curriculum survey. Students were notified through a new departmental email titled “swdiversity” about the opportunity to be involved in the project.

Initially, over twenty graduate and undergraduate students volunteered to participate in the survey development process. The students were encouraged to ask questions, provide input, and take shared ownership in the project. This open discussion format stemmed directly from the feedback Dickinson and Fry received during the listening posts. The team began meeting in person weekly to begin developing the survey instrument. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted the ability of many students to remain actively engaged in the project, and the team numbers began to dwindle before plummeting after the university dormitories closed and all classes were moved online. After a brief adjustment period, our work continued through the use of electronic documents. By the end of the summer, our team consisted of just two student members: Myself, an undergraduate, and Madison Neece, a social work graduate student. However, with input and feedback from department faculty and a variety of other campus offices and professionals, we were able to create our implicit curriculum survey and administer it to students within the department in the middle of our fall 2020 semester.

Method

Participants

The survey was designed to be taken by both undergraduate social work majors and pre-majors, as well as all MSW students regardless of whether they were on-campus or a part of the distance education program. A total of 133 students took the survey (43% response rate). Thirty-three of those responses were from graduate students (24.8%), while the remaining 98 were from undergraduates (73.7%). Of the graduate students, 69.7% were on-campus students and 30.3% were in the distancing learning program. In regards to their program standing, 33.3% were in UNI's advanced standing social work program, 24.2% were in our foundation program (first-year students without an undergraduate degree in social work), and the remaining 42.4% were in a specialization program (students with an undergraduate degree in social work or second-year students without an undergraduate degree in social work). Fifty-six percent of undergraduate responses were from students who were already accepted into the social work program, while 40.1% were pre-majors. Approximately 19.4% were freshman (less than 30 credit hours completed), 23.5% were sophomores (30-59 credit hours completed), 34.7% were juniors (60-89 credit hours completed), and 20.4% were seniors (90+ credit hours completed). Using Qualtrics logic in the survey design, participants received different options based on their response to the above questions regarding their program of study. For example, participants who selected "Undergraduate" received the question regarding acceptance into the program versus pre-major status. For MSW participants, who selected "Distance Education," questions regarding experiences with classroom spaces were eliminated from their survey because they do not take any classes in-person at the university.

Procedure

To administer the survey to students, our research team first had to seek IRB approval. Once approved, the survey was administered to all students within the social work department via the “swdiversity” email that was created at the start of the listening posts. The Qualtrics survey could be taken electronically on a laptop or cell phone, and students were given almost three weeks to complete it. In order for students of all abilities to be able to complete the survey, students were provided the option of a different format. In addition to the electronic Qualtrics version, there was a printable rendering that could be completed individually by a student or could be read to them and filled out by a member of our team upon request.

Design

At the start of our survey drafting, our research team worked from a previous, paper-only, survey that was administered once to undergraduate students in 2013 and once to graduate students within UNI’s social work department in 2014. It was comprised of 86 Likert scale items, and there was a consensus among our team that it was much too long. Several of the original questions were also more related to explicit rather than implicit curriculum. The team then set out to edit and eliminate some of the initial survey items by looking at the following two criteria: (1) Does it measure implicit curriculum? and (2) Does it measure an area of importance to the team?

Eventually, the team created a finished survey consisting of thirty-five quantitative items under seven categories ([Table 1](#)) and three qualitative questions ([Table 2](#)). For the quantitative questions, participants were asked to identify their agreement level for each item statement using a 6-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - somewhat disagree, 4 - somewhat agree, 5 - agree, 6 - strongly agree). Two items contained detailed lists in which participants

were asked to answer specifically on the experiences of eighteen different identity groups. Counting these two complex items using category responses, participants responded to a total of 69 quantitative items. The team intentionally chose not to include a neutral Likert scale response option such as “Neutral” or “I Don’t Know,” because we felt that it could potentially provide an “out” where participants could then avoid recognizing and engaging with issues that privilege may generally protect them from.

The survey’s three qualitative questions asked participants to respond to what they believed the department was doing well to create an inclusive and affirming environment for all students, what they believed the department needed to improve on to create an inclusive and affirming environment and a place to provide additional comments. We included these qualitative questions to provide a more nuanced view of social work students’ needs and wants within our department, and they were intentionally broad to allow for students to interpret them in a way that allowed them to express what they felt was most important.

The decision was made early on in our survey drafting for this survey to be administered annually to allow for data comparison over a period of several years. Care was taken to ensure that each of the questions would provide relevant results over time, as any need to revise the survey after the first administration would affect the ability of the team to compare results over time.

Survey Results

Based on the information obtained from the listening posts, the research team and department administration fully expected to receive negative results with the first administration. Our results mirrored several of the negative experiences students were sharing in their #UNIsnotanAlly testimonials, as well as in their discussions with Dickinson and Fry. With that

in mind, our team viewed the fall 2020 administration as a baseline with the hope that the yearly administration of the survey moving forward will provide evidence of improved scores as the department actively responds to the needs of students in years to come. Much of the quantitative data that we collected matched what Dickinson and Fry were hearing from their listening posts. “My participation is welcome in the Social Work student organization” and “The Department makes efforts to retain students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities” both received the lowest ratings (i.e. somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree) on the Likert Scale. The items “Within the Department, faculty and staff support tribal affiliation status” and “Other Social Work students contribute to an inclusive and affirming atmosphere for tribal affiliation status” also received low ratings on the Likert Scale and mirrored feedback from the listening posts as well as student testimonies from REC’s #UNIisnotanAlly movement.

When coding the qualitative data, our team grouped similar responses into thematic categories and removed skipped or “none” responses to quantify our results. Definitions were then written to explain the theme depicted in the responses. We identified three common themes to the survey question “What does the Department need to improve on to create a more inclusive and affirming environment for all students?”. The first theme was Diverse Recruitment; 12% of students (n=7) identified that the department needed a more concerted effort to recruit faculty, staff, and students from diverse identities. The second theme was Explicit Curriculum; 12% of students (n=7) felt that there needed to be a greater focus on courses that explicitly discuss and address issues of oppressed communities. The third theme was Safety in Classroom Discussion; 7 respondents (12%) identified that faculty failed to consistently provide a safe classroom environment for difficult conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion to take place in.

When coding the responses for the survey question “What is the Department doing well to create an inclusive and affirming environment for all students,” the four themes of faculty behavior (n=28), asking for and accepting feedback (n=8), explicit curriculum (n=8), and classroom policies (n=8) were identified. From the qualitative survey item “Any additional comments” we identified one theme: This work is valid. Out of 26 responses to this survey item, just over 23% of students’ (n=6) responses indicated that they felt validated and appreciative of our department for taking steps to measure our social work program’s learning environment. One of the responses in this section read “Thank you for doing this. It validates concerns about our department and highlights strong points within the program as well.”

Future Directions

As more accredited social work programs across the United States work to meet the CSWE’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, more implicit curriculum surveys are likely to be developed, administered, and published. Though results vary slightly from program to program, there seem to be several similarities in terms of areas for improvement among many of the published results thus far that mirrored our survey findings as well. For example, in a 2011 study of MSW students in North Carolina, survey results indicated that the learning environment that faculty members created directly impacted whether the students felt comfortable and safe offering input in the classroom or speaking out to the campus community (Grady, Despard, Powers, & Naylor, 2011). In another study of MSW students, it was found that having a strong sense of community, increasing diversity of faculty and staff, and involving students in decision-making processes within the department all contributed to students feeling more empowered in their program of study (Peterson, Farmer, & Zippay, 2014).

As we continue to see a rise of student-led social media campaigns, peaceful protests, and calls for action from their university administrators, schools must start to implement ways in which student concerns can be voiced and addressed. Though it is unlikely that a single department can shape and impact the entire university of which it is a part, the use of an implicit curriculum survey can help expose issues within the department and help legitimize the concerns and requests of diverse students who are the first to point out these deficiencies. Though the CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards only require the analysis of a university's social work program, the tool that we have developed can be used across almost all programs of study or be adjusted to fit the university as a whole. The environment in which we as students receive our education (i.e. the implicit curriculum) does not start and stop at the doors of our classroom or the entrance of our department building. You can see and feel it through interactions with peers, while walking in the halls of your dormitory, or even while standing in line at the food court. It is simply not enough that the assessment of this environment stops with one department's survey.

Conclusion

Evidence shows that implicit curriculum plays an important role in the learning, development, and professional outcome of social work students. Though the EPAS guided our research team's development of an implicit curriculum survey tool, it was personal testimonies and individual concerns raised by students on campus who shaped our survey and helped us determine what types of questions were important to ask. During a time when tension is high across university campuses and students are feeling discriminated against and unheard, it is vital to engage students and allow them to provide critical feedback when looking at how a department and university can improve. Though this is a path our research team took from the

very beginning, it is not often the case for other university departments and administrations across Iowa and in the United States. Student insight should always be listened to when attempting to make the department or university-wide change, as their experience within the implicit curriculum gives them a heightened sense of the deficiencies and injustices within the environment that they receive their education.

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Table 1: Implicit Curriculum Survey Quantitative Items by Category

<p>Department Programming</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Department provides programs that address the needs of persons who hold identities that have been marginalized. 2. The Department makes efforts to recruit students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 3. The Department makes efforts to retain students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities.
<p>Department Programming</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. The Department provides programs that address the needs of persons who hold identities that have been marginalized. 5. The Department makes efforts to recruit students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 6. The Department makes efforts to retain students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities.
<p>Faculty</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. The Social Work faculty and staff provide in-class educational opportunities from a wide scope of diverse experiences, backgrounds, and identities. 8. The Department makes efforts to increase the recruitment of faculty from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 9. The Department is committed to retaining faculty from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 10. The Department is committed to hiring faculty who are supportive of students from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. 11. The Department is committed to hiring faculty who can effectively engage in crucial discussions around diversity and equity. 12. I am aware of opportunities the Department provides for students to be engaged in the hiring process for new faculty.
<p>Opportunities for Involvement</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. The Department provides information on how I can be involved in the Social Work student organization. 14. My participation is welcome in the Social Work student organization. 15. I am notified of Department events students can attend. 16. My participation is welcome at Department events students can attend. 17. I am notified of Department opportunities (e.g. partnering with faculty members on their work, presenting my own work, leadership opportunities, scholarship applications, etc.). 18. My participation is welcome in Department opportunities (e.g. partnering with faculty members on their work, presenting my own work, leadership opportunities, scholarship applications, etc.).
<p>Support from Faculty</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. The Department is responsive to issues that are important to me. 20. The Department creates a learning environment that is supportive of my success. 21. There are Social Work faculty I can go to when I have personal issues. 22. I feel valued by Social Work faculty and staff. 23. I feel respected as an individual by Social Work faculty and staff.

24. My point of view is respected by Social Work faculty members.

25. Within the Department, faculty and staff support:

- a. Ability Diversity
- b. Age Diversity
- c. Body Shape and Size Diversity
- d. Citizenship Diversity
- e. Color Diversity
- f. Country of Origin Diversity
- g. Ethnic Diversity
- h. Gender Diversity
- i. Language Diversity
- j. Military/Veteran Status
- k. Parenting Status
- l. Political Beliefs & Involvement Diversity
- m. Pregnant & Breastfeeding/Chest-feeding Status
- n. Racial Diversity
- o. Religious/Spiritual/Belief Diversity
- p. Sexual Orientation Diversity
- q. Socioeconomics Status Diversity
- r. Tribal Affiliation Status
- s. Additional Identities (Write-In)

Academic & Classroom Environment

26. SW faculty provide course material that meets my accessibility needs (i.e. sharing PowerPoint slides, recording lectures, alternative testing locations, large font, etc.)
27. The Department provides access to different learning options to meet the needs of all students (i.e. recorded lectures, online course options, different class time options, etc.).
28. Social Work faculty are responsive to student feedback about courses.
29. Social Work faculty set fair expectations for all students in the classroom.
30. Classroom spaces provide a comfortable physical environment that is conducive to learning. (N/A for distance education students)
31. Classroom spaces provide an accessible physical environment that is conducive to learning. (N/A for distance education students)
32. Social Work faculty and staff model social work values and ethics.

Sense of Community

33. My classmates contribute to a safe and respectful learning environment.
34. Social Work faculty foster a sense of community between classmates.
35. I feel connected with other people in the Department.
36. Other Social Work students contribute to an inclusive and affirming atmosphere for:
 - a. Ability Diversity
 - b. Age Diversity
 - c. Body Shape and Size Diversity
 - d. Citizenship Diversity
 - e. Color Diversity
 - f. Country of Origin Diversity
 - g. Ethnic Diversity
 - h. Gender Diversity
 - i. Language Diversity
 - j. Military/Veteran Status
 - k. Parenting Status
 - l. Political Beliefs & Involvement Diversity
 - m. Pregnant & Breastfeeding/Chest-feeding Status
 - n. Racial Diversity
 - o. Religious/Spiritual/Belief Diversity
 - p. Sexual Orientation Diversity
 - q. Socioeconomics Status Diversity
 - r. Tribal Affiliation Status
 - s. Additional Identities (Write-In)

Diversity Competence

37. I feel confident in my own abilities to have crucial discussions around diversity and equity.
38. Social Work course materials, including case examples/scenarios, elevate voices from a wide diversity of backgrounds and identities.

Table 2: Implicit Curriculum Survey Qualitative Items

1. What is the Department doing well to create an inclusive and affirming environment for all students?
2. What does the Department need to improve on to create a more inclusive and affirming environment for all students?
3. Any additional comments: