

The Global Reach of Social Work: Exploring Motivations and Participation in a Social Work MOOC

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Abstract: *Technological innovations in social work education support efforts to expand the global reach of social work education. Massive open online courses (MOOCs) represent one type of innovation; however, little is known about their potential for promoting global social work. In 2015, our school of social work developed the first known social work MOOC using the edX platform. In this paper, we explore the initial voluntary survey data from registrants (n=992) to determine participation patterns and motivations. Our data indicates that the MOOC engaged participants from over 180 countries, with over one-third (35%) from the United States. Over 40% of participants rated themselves as novices with social work content. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses suggests that many participants were working in organizations or NGOs and wanted information about how to be more effective as a worker in these settings. Their participation in the MOOC allowed for exploration of a social work educational program. Further analysis of demographic trends, motivations, and participation levels suggests that MOOCs can be a platform for extending the reach of social work education to global social work settings. More research is needed to fully explore the potential of this educational platform for expanding the reach of social work education globally.*

Keywords: *Global social work; web-based learning; massive online open courses; social work education*

Social work's global reach is expanding. From 2000 to 2010 the number of degree programs in social work increased by 50%; hundreds more programs have taken root since 2010 (Barretta-Herman, Leung, Littlechild, Parada, & Wairire, 2016). Globally, there is an untapped growth in social work education that could address the changing demands of contemporary societies including rapid economic shifts, urbanization, rising inequality, migration, and human trafficking, all impacting human rights.

Online coursework, continuing education, and distance education approaches within social work education are on the rise. A survey of 137 schools of social work in the United States showed that 72% of BSW and 56% of MSW programs offered instruction via the internet, 9% and 32% offered television-based instruction, and 19% and 12% featured combined approaches (Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009). There is a need and desire for social work education to keep pace with trends in student learning. Rapidly expanding technologies offer opportunities for social work education to expand innovative practice with digital tools that increase the reach of social work to audiences that have had limited exposure or are geographically distant from existing programs (Coe Regan & Youn, 2008; Wretman & Macy, 2016). Indeed, an increasing number of social

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work schools are offering online or hybrid programs and many now offer accredited fully online programs. According to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) 2015 report on social work education, 60% of MSW programs had some component of online or hybrid education. CSWE (2019) lists 27 BSW and 79 MSW part-time or fully online accredited programs.

This paper examines the response to a massive online open course (MOOCs) within our school of social work. MOOCs are open learning educational courses. They contrast with the more traditional forms of online courses, such as distance learning or online education programs, in that they are generally free courses open and available to anyone with a connection to the internet. They do not require acceptance or application to enroll in the course. Once learners enroll, they are often in control of the process given that most are offered as self-paced courses with no penalty for not finishing.

The University of Michigan School of Social Work is at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. In 2016, we worked with our university's Academic Innovation office to develop and launch a MOOC on the edX platform. The MOOC focused broadly on the field of social work through a U.S. perspective by exploring the foundations of the field, core frameworks, history and policy issues, and providing opportunities for critical reflection on social justice, power, and privilege within the context of social work practice. This was the first MOOC specifically focused on the field of social work on the edX platform.

The MOOC was initially developed for the purpose of supporting our school's incoming master's-level students and offering a resource for workforce development within the U.S. social work field on an ongoing basis. However, because MOOCs are available globally through the web-based platform, we quickly learned that many learners from across the world were enrolled in the introductory social work course. Since its launch in 2016, over 9,000 participants from across the world have enrolled in the course. This sparked our interest in understanding the potential of the MOOC for social work and the implications for social work education in a global context. Since this initial MOOC, we have since launched five additional MOOCs. These MOOCs are: (a) Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups; (b) Diversity and Social Justice in Social Work; (c) Social Work Practice in Community Organization, Management, and Policy/Evaluation; (d) Social Work Research; and (e) Social Welfare Policy and Services. This paper focuses on our experience with the initial MOOC. Drawing from our learning about the broad range of students who enrolled in the initial MOOC, we discuss the implications and the potential of MOOCs within the field of social work. While we are not advocating that MOOCs in any way replace standard accredited social work education, we do believe they can offer some opportunities to introduce social work to a broad audience, to share examples in a broader and more accessible way, and to support workforce development to further the field.

Background of MOOCs

Social work is positioned for innovation and engaging new technologies as a way to promote social work education and workforce development (Gates & Walters, 2015).

Many scholars argue that technology expansion aligns directly with the values of the social work profession, i.e. to promote social justice and empowerment (Coe Regan & Youn, 2008; Gates & Walters, 2015; Maidment, 2005; Wretman & Macy, 2016). For example, Kurzman (2013) notes that “the online revolution offers intriguing opportunities for broadening and extending access to social work education” (p. 336). More recently, there is increasing interest among scholars, including those who are part of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare’s Grand Challenges, to understand methods to “harness technological advancements and leverage digital advances for social good” (Berzin, Singer, & Chan, 2015, p. 3).

This call for innovation and engagement presents a platform for exploring additional types of technological advances, such as MOOCs. MOOCs were first known to be offered in 2011 by Stanford University (Gates & Walters, 2015; Kurzman, 2013). Since that time, educational platforms including Coursera (2019) and edX (2019) have served as a home to hundreds of MOOCs on topics that range from business management to the history of art. Indeed, many other fields of education, including schools of education, business, information, engineering, and systems management, have been leading proponents of the use of MOOCs due to their open platform and availability as a free resource to any interested learner with access to internet and technology (Alexander, 2014; Liyanagunawardena, Adams, & Williams, 2013; Yuan & Powell, 2013).

Despite the potential, most of the research around MOOCs has emerged in other fields such as education, business, and information, with generally less scholarship and understanding about these potentials within social work (Richards-Schuster, Ruffolo & Hiltz, 2019, Gates & Walters, 2015). Most of the work to date has examined questions about audience, motivations, and outcomes. For example, studies suggest that MOOCs attract a diverse global audience from many countries, cultural backgrounds, and ages. In addition, the research suggests that the majority of these learners tend to be those with college degrees who are looking to gain additional educational and career benefits, such as mobility or workforce advancement (Jung, 2016; Stich & Reeves, 2017; Zhenghao et al., 2015). Other studies have looked at learner motivation, finding that intrinsic motivation, a desire to solve problems, and self-determination were critical factors to completing MOOCs (Barak, Watted, & Haick, 2016; Hew & Cheung, 2014). Some scholars raise questions about the ability of MOOCs to retain learners, recognizing that overall completion rates for MOOCs hover at 10% of those who enroll (Hone & Said, 2016).

In addition to retention, scholars have also been critical of MOOCs, in that they can heighten divides due to non-universal technology access, that most MOOCs have been created in English, making them difficult to access for non-English language learners, and that MOOCs may further push a western, neo-colonialist framework for understanding issues (Altbach, 2014; Finardi & Tyler, 2015; Gates & Walters, 2015; Literat, 2015). Others question the rigor, quality, and legitimacy of MOOCs as platforms for education (Daniel, 2012). Ma and Lee (2018) argue that despite the promise of promoting equity and access, developing countries face barriers due to lack of internet access, perception of their value, and the traditional expectation of education as being in the classroom rather than in an internet format.

While these are all important critiques, there is also opportunity to see and explore the potential of MOOCs within social work. While there has been some interest in exploring the role of MOOCs within the field, there has been little research on the particular role of MOOCs within social work (Barretta et al., 2016; Berzin et al., 2015, Gates & Walters, 2015; Hawkins, Martin, McKay, & Pattanayak, 2017).

Within the existing literature on MOOCs in social work, scholars have considered the potential of MOOCs or examined MOOCs within a larger understanding of the role of technology within social work education, such as distance learning or online courses. For example, Gates and Walters (2015) speak to the potential importance of MOOCs within social work, arguing that “each MOOC has the potential for reaching hundreds of thousands of students globally. Any person with an internet connection could access SWE (social work education) via a MOOC” (p. 189). Gates and Walters (2015) further suggest that MOOCs could play a significant role in supporting educational development in the expanding global social work field and contribute to promoting social work’s social justice mission. In particular, these scholars state that MOOCs could help promote baseline knowledge about the field, eliminate disparities around access to evidence-based approaches, and could “have significant impact for social justice workers in developing or underdeveloped economies” (Gates & Walters, 2015, p. 189). These possibilities warrant further investigation into the efficacy of MOOCs as a tool for promoting professional development, providing support in addressing issues of injustice and human rights, and promoting human well-being.

More research, however, is needed to understand the value of MOOCs within social work, and in particular to understand the motivations and implications for students, from around the globe, to enroll in a US-based social work MOOC. While these are important questions, for the purpose of this paper we focus on understanding who enrolls and their motivation for enrolling. Thus, we used data from the school’s first MOOC to explore two key questions: What are the demographic characteristics of those who enroll in a social work MOOC and how do they participate? What motivations drive people to enroll?

Background of Social Work MOOC

Our school of social work is part of a large public university located in the Midwest and offers a master’s of social work (MSW), and an advanced placement program for students with a bachelor’s of social work (BSW), with an annual enrollment of approximately 350–400 students. The MSW program is full-time with no option for a part-time program. Our school also has an undergraduate minor focused on social justice, and a PhD program that is jointly offered with five social science doctoral programs. For many years, our school has offered multiple online continuing education programs and certificates, and some faculty engaged in hybrid or flipped classroom experiences. However, our school did not have an online program or MOOC-like course prior to 2016.

In 2016, we launched a MOOC entitled “Social Work: Advocating Social Justice and Change.” The MOOC engaged much of the school’s faculty and teams of students and alumni to develop a comprehensive course aimed at introducing participants to social work as a profession and exploring social work’s contributions to work with individuals,

families, communities, and organizations, and in policy-making arenas within the United States. The MOOC includes five modules as described in Table 1.

Table 1. *Social Work: Advocating Social Justice and Change MOOC Modules*

Module	Description
1. Introduction to Social Work	Explores the field of social work and the roles that social workers play in society.
2. Major Social Work Frameworks and Concepts	Covers major frameworks and social work concepts that inform practice.
3. History of Social Work	Highlights the history of the field and the scope of policy issues within social work research and practice.
4. Power, Privilege, and Diversity	Details the importance of power, privilege, diversity, and social justice for social work as a field.
5. MSW Education	Provides an overview of MSW education, specifically in our school's program, and key advice for incoming students.

Each module included a range of engaged learning techniques, including videos, timelines, discussions, expert lectures, and case studies. In total, the MOOC included approximately eight hours of interactive content.

The MOOC was piloted to the incoming MSW class in the summer of 2016. The pilot allowed us to evaluate the effectiveness of a MOOC as a tool to prepare students for entering a graduate program in social work. After the beta-test and a few tweaks to the content, the MOOC was launched publicly on the edX platform in fall 2016. Anyone with access to a computer and the Internet could enroll in the course at no cost. The MOOC was launched as a self-paced course, meaning that anyone could enroll in the course at any point and that the course could be completed on user's own timeline. Those who completed the MOOC were eligible to pay for a certificate of completion that could be used to verify their participation. The certificate, offered through edX, costs roughly \$100.

While we knew that there would be a captive audience amongst our students who would be strongly encouraged as part of their orientation to take the MOOC prior to entering the program, we were unsure about the broader audience and why people would enroll in a social work MOOC. This paper provides the initial evaluation of the first year's enrollment in the MOOC.

Methods

The course evaluation was based on general enrollment data from the first year of the MOOC, a voluntary participant survey at the start of the course, and tracking of engagement in modules completed by participants. This paper tracks participants who enrolled in the MOOC from September 2016–September 2017. Over this 13-month period, there were 9,120 participants. A total of 992 participants (11%) completed the voluntary participant survey at the start of the course. All 9,120 participants were tracked using engagement measures within the edX platform.

Demographic data was self-reported by participants (n=9,120) and included information on age, country/geographic location, gender, and educational background. The

tracking of all participants involved using edX statistics to monitor how many modules were completed in the MOOC, including the number of quizzes taken, responses to activities, number of activities completed, and number of videos watched.

Additional data is drawn from edX's course participant survey. This survey is offered to participants at the beginning of each specific course. Participation in the survey is voluntary and anonymous. The edX platform developed survey questions that captured information about participant motivations, including interest in taking the MOOC, previous experiences with MOOCs, motivation for completing the MOOC, and participant goals and expected outcomes.

We used a two-stage approach to analyze the data for this paper. First, we explored the edX enrollment data, drawing largely on descriptive statistics to analyze participant enrollment characteristics and participation levels. Second, we used thematic analysis to explore participant motivations as reported as part of the survey data and in the MOOC activity responses. Themes were also identified based on responses to open-ended questions in enrollment data using NVivo. Team members reviewed the themes independently as well as in meetings. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus was reached. Because we approached the thematic review in this way, we did not calculate inter-rater reliability.

There were some limitations. Most importantly, we were limited by the data categories that edX collected. We were also limited by the survey questions provided by the edX platform and the voluntary nature of their survey. As a result, our analyses were limited to general themes and descriptive statistics. In addition, we provide quotes from the survey but the way the data was collected by edX it is impossible for us to link quotes to individual respondents. However, given the exploratory nature of this pilot study, we feel that the data is important to report despite these shortcomings. Specific limitations are included as they relate to findings in the following section.

Results

In this section, we first describe participant demographics of those enrolled in the course and the findings related to their participation in the course. Secondly, we share the findings related to the interests and motivations of enrolled learners. The results draw on both descriptive and narrative data.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this course represent a global community. Drawing on the enrollment data, participants came from over 184 countries and regions. Participants from the United States comprised 35% (n=3,286) of the learners. Other than the United States, nations represented by more than 100 participants included Canada, India, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Nigeria, Brazil, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Mexico. The following countries had between 50 and 100 participants: Spain, Colombia, France, South Africa, South Korea, Philippines, Greece, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Japan, Vietnam, Kenya, Russia, Egypt, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Romania.

Of the 9,120 participants, the median age was 30 years. Approximately 52% were between the ages of 26 and 40 years. The next-largest group of learners (29%) were under 25 years. Over 48% of the participants had a college degree and 25% had advanced degrees. In terms of gender, 63% identified as female and 35% as male. The edX survey did not request information about race/ethnicity, nor did it provide more robust categories for gender identity beyond a binary male/female.

On average, approximately 120 participants engaged with the MOOC each week. For these participants, in a typical week, about 50 watched a video, 15 tried an activity or problem, and 20 participated in discussions. The MOOC has five modules and between 79% and 88% of the videos in the modules were completed by participants.

Participant Interests, Motivations, and Learning

Of those who took the voluntary survey (n=992), more than half of the participants (55%) had never taken a MOOC before enrolling in this course. Of those participants who had taken a MOOC before, 70% had taken between one and three MOOCs prior to this course. When asked to rate their level of knowledge regarding the focus of the MOOC prior to taking the course, 44% reported that they were new to the material (novices), 15% felt that they were proficient, and 30% indicated that they felt competent in this particular knowledge area.

Of the 992 survey respondents, 335 expected to earn a certificate, 397 planned to complete all the course requirements, and 149 expected to mainly peruse the course content. For first-time MOOC participants, 35% thought that they would earn a certificate and 42% expected to complete all of the course requirements. Over one-third of the participants who enrolled in the MOOC thought that taking it would help them progress in school, another third reported that the content areas interested them, and another third viewed the information in this MOOC as helping them in their job.

While difficult to ascertain participant motivation, there were questions in both the enrollment data and the voluntary survey that spoke to participant interest in enrolling in the MOOC and that requested their thoughts about its value. In the enrollment survey, participants were asked to share their main reason for enrolling in the MOOC. Although there was a range of responses, a few key themes emerged. One key theme was participants' interest in furthering their knowledge or education. In some instances, there was a specific interest in social work, and in others, participants' interest was in learning more generally. For example, participants who specifically articulated an interest in gaining knowledge of social work stated:

To increase my knowledge in different fields and my critical thinking as a law student, also to take advantage of the interaction with other students and prestigious teachers around the world.

I have chaired a human rights NGO for women and children in crisis using the universal human rights provision to defend them in their situation. Yet, many things are unclear to me about the implementation of those rights by those who created them. It has become too many conventions without judicial remedy. So I

would like to deepen my knowledge of human rights and in cases of non-compliance what remedies are available? What legal body provide the conventions a cause of action?

It is my dream to fulfill my passion to educate children in the rural communities about the importance of health issues and more.

Others spoke of their love of learning and their interest in growing personally and professionally through lifelong learning opportunities:

I love learning and miss the interactivity of an academic environment. I hope to keep my mind sharp. I'm an advocate for promoting greater (free) access to higher education and the wonderful possibilities of MOOC.

Simply, I miss learning. My life has come to a place in which fresh ideas are absent. I want the new perspectives and better understanding afforded by education.

Some of the participants mentioned the convenience of learning or cost as a prime motivator for taking the course. For example, a few of these participants mentioned, "It is self-paced and convenient," and "I can't attend or afford college anymore...but I want to keep learning."

An interesting, although not surprising finding, was that a portion of the participants joined to improve their English skills. For example, "I am in need to learn English as I am becoming aware of its importance in my country as well as in the region and all over the world. English is a very useful tool of communication that can serve everyone in his life." For these students, it was unclear how much the content mattered to them.

Once participants began the MOOC, when asked to introduce themselves and their reason for joining in a class chat board, about one-third indicated that they wanted to explore what social work is and how social work makes a difference in the world. They also frequently indicated that they were taking this course to explore starting a degree in social work. Some shared that they are community activists and wanted to learn theories and skills about how to empower others. In their introduction of themselves almost all participants indicated a desire to further their understanding of social justice and advocacy.

These responses echoed many of those given in the initial enrollment registration and focused on participants' interest in gaining more knowledge about the field of social work, either as a way to further their existing knowledge or as a way to gain some basic understanding about the field of social work. For example, some illustrative quotes from participants about their reasons for taking the MOOC included:

I am looking to expand my knowledge of the Social Work field.

I have been interested in learning more about the field of social work to see if it could be a good fit for me to pursue.

I opted to take this course as I want to further my knowledge in the social justice field.

I've worked in homeless shelters and food banks for several years. Now hoping to gain more skills to advance my abilities in the field of Social Work.

A few participants specifically discussed their participation in the MOOC in relation to their interest in an MSW degree:

I'm here to gain knowledge as I believe it will benefit me when I hopefully get accepted into one of my five choices of University.

I'm applying to Social Work Masters programs, and I want to learn a little bit more about the field of social work before I apply.

Possibly the most meaningful narrative data about participant motivations and learning comes from some of the responses of MOOC participants related to their understanding about the value of the MOOC with respect to their own interests. In these cases, participants shared key takeaways for them as individuals and mainly reflect their interest in further developing skills and understanding about social work. For example, one participant stated:

This MOOC has provided a good reminder of the importance of approaching situations with humility and self-awareness, so as to try to avoid perpetuating forms of oppression unconsciously...I also think, along with the humility comes a calling to be curious. If I am going to gain an understanding of people whose lives are quite different from my own, I have to be curious to know more about their experiences and worldview...As a social worker I would hope to cultivate both deep and broad knowledge of possible interventions from which I and a client could draw together.

Others reflected on the social justice components of the MOOC and the ways in which the MOOC helped empower them to advocate for change in their own community. For example:

To me, the social justice component is very important, and it ties in with the difference between providing (charity) and empowering (justice). Because advocating for social justice is, at its heart, about empowering people who may not have a lot of power, it is more controversial than charity. Dom Helder Camara, a Brazilian Archbishop, captured this dynamic when he said, "When I feed the hungry, they call me a saint. When I ask why people are hungry, they call me a Communist."

Still another noted:

Watching these videos is like looking at my values in a mirror. It is the direction I wish to go with what I currently do within the community. Caring about others, supporting others, advocating for others.

For others, the MOOC provided an example of how to connect social workers and social change agents, who have limited access to social work-specific knowledge or content, and become empowered to work for social justice in their home community. These quotes illuminate the ability of social work MOOCs to have a broader reach beyond delivering specific educational content. For example, one participant noted:

I come from a community that is marginalized, no electricity, no potable water (drink from stream), no access road, we have to walk for 5 km to access a health

facility that has only a nurse assistance, and no primary nor secondary school. We have a population of about 4800 inhabitants there. With the knowledge I have gained from this course, I am better equipped now to go to the village and hold a rally to see how the village can come up with programs that will benefit them based on their resources.

Another specifically spoke to the importance of social work:

Homelessness had been alien to my country until the recent craze of rural folks to get into the urban centers. Prior to urbanization, the extended family system practiced in most parts of the country ensured that each and every person was housed. Urbanization has however drawn so many young people into the cities without a plan. Building affordable housing...has been a goal for almost every government for the past 12 years however this goal has not been very easy to achieve. Looking at all these issues and the role social workers play to get all these social problems solved, it brings me to the conclusion that social workers are becoming indispensable in our modern-day societies.

Still another:

As a development practitioner in a developing country, the first grand challenge to look into the ways of reducing economic inequalities grabbed my attention and as a student of environment sciences who led its social interest by doing masters in Environment and Development,; I found that creating social response to a changing environment is what I am seeking to do in my development/ social work practice...One of the important take away messages for me is that policy level advocacy...is a must in order to seek change or to improve any situation. An integrated policy framework is required in order to move things in a more impactful and sustainable manner.

Discussion

The findings confirm what the emerging literature on MOOCs has indicated related to who takes MOOCs and their motivations for taking a MOOC. Other studies similarly reported that participants represented a global community, most had college degrees, and many viewed the MOOC as a way to enhance work functioning (Gates & Walters, 2015; Jung, 2016; Stich & Reeves, 2017). The broad, global reach of this MOOC (over 184 countries/regions) reflected participants' strong interest in learning more about social work and social justice. The motivations for taking this course (including personal growth, time constraints, financial constraints, and increasing knowledge) are also consistent with findings from other studies (Barak et al., 2016; Hew & Cheung, 2014).

The findings extend what we know about the interest that the global community has in learning more about social work even if from a United States perspective. From the themes that emerged, many of these participants shared that they were working in organizations or NGOs and felt a need for more information about how to be more effective as a worker in these settings. The MOOC also helped provide an introduction to graduate education in social work for participants who might apply at a later point to a social work program.

The level of engagement in the MOOC was impressive. The takeaway messages that participants shared about the learning with respect to social work key values and theories that occurred in the MOOC illustrates the value of this type of platform for helping participants to apply their learning to real-world settings.

It is critical to note that while MOOCs show promise as a tool for raising awareness about social work as a field, empowering individuals within communities, providing support for workforce development, and supporting educational practices, they cannot be viewed as a global graduate degree. At a minimum, educational practices must fit specific global needs, both from accreditation and competency perspectives, and as a practice-engaged field, it is essential to remember that MOOC coursework can provide only a small fraction of what is needed for a master's of social work degree. As a field we must examine new technologies and innovations for workforce development and education that enable schools of social work and global associations to work in innovative ways to promote a new vision for the field (Gates & Walters, 2015; Hawkins et al., 2017; Robbins, Coe Regan, Williams, Smyth, & Bogo, 2016).

Implications and Recommendations

In this paper, we explored the initial evaluation of our social work MOOC to understand who enrolled and their motivations for enrollment. Based on the findings and discussion, there are several potential implications for consideration by the broader field of social work practitioners, researchers, and educators.

First, the preliminary evaluation of our MOOC suggests that there is global interest in social work. Thus, more innovation should be occurring with the global online space to promote the value of social work as a tool for workforce development and for empowering individuals to address injustices and build the capacity for social work in various settings. While more research is needed, the findings suggest that MOOCs can help expand social work in multiple ways, including to those who do not have access to schools of social work in their own communities and to those who are unsure about whether social work is a field they want to pursue.

Second, we have learned from our own internal work and pilot that MOOCs can be helpful for providing baseline content knowledge about the field as a way to prepare incoming MSW students for graduate study. In addition, in our own school we are exploring innovative ways to use MOOCs in a hybrid classroom experience as a way to accelerate coursework and allow for more discussion and experiential learning. We also know, because of the no-cost nature of MOOCs, that other universities, especially universities outside of the United States, are using aspects of this MOOC to highlight social work within a United States context. Especially because they are free and not tied to online distance learning credit programs, MOOCs offer opportunities to be innovative and creative in looking at cross-cultural exchanges of information and learning. MOOCs also can be a platform in which multiple universities can collaborate on versions of a course to be offered in multiple countries or with multiple perspectives (Chingos, Griffiths, Mulhern, & Spies, 2017). Indeed, we are currently working on such a collaboration with schools of social work in Norway, Chile, and Singapore to develop a course focused on global child

welfare practices. This type of learning relates to what Hawkins et al. (2017) described as the potential for global MOOC communities. While innovative in nature, we recognize that this approach would need further exploration to examine any accreditation issues that would emerge.

Third, MOOCs should be explored further as a tool for workforce development. This new platform enables social work educators to expand their connection to various employment sectors, such as law enforcement or health care, for which there are social work implications but potentially fewer shared education programs. Given the motivations expressed by the students who enrolled in this MOOC, there is also interest by those in other countries who plan to get a social work credential but do not have access to formal social work education courses.

Fourth, MOOCs can be an opportunity to share the concept and practices of social work to a global audience. Whether this audience seeks out social work courses or finds the course when exploring options, a MOOC offers a no-cost opportunity to explore our field, values, and approaches. For our school, the initial evaluation suggests the global potential for MOOCs and opens up the possibilities for re-thinking our engagement outside of the classroom. Based on this MOOC, our school initiated a pilot of a MicroMasters program, a series of related MOOCs on social work foundational content (research, interpersonal practice, macro practice, social justice, and social welfare policy) that when taken along with a set of credentials and exams, could be used to help advance a student's academic program or be leveraged as a workforce credential. This MicroMasters program launched in 2018 and over time it will undoubtedly raise future questions for research. In addition, we continue to evaluate the impact of the MOOC on our own master's students to explore the long-term impact of MOOCs on classroom learning.

All of these potential implications, however, must be weighed against the potential ethical issues and the value of learners using MOOCs to engage in social work. For example, our MOOC was about U.S. social work specifically, and did not engage with exploration of social work in other contexts. We must grapple with the balance between introducing and empowering learners to engage with social work and social justice concepts and the understanding about the ethical issues of new learners feeling as though they are able to practice social work in any practical way. Furthermore, given that our MOOC was specifically based in a U.S. context, there is also need to critique the limitations of a U.S. framework for global social work. Our experience suggests that there is need for discussions about the ethical issues of MOOCs and the global development of MOOCs for the social work field. Presentations such as those at the *hustITa* (Human Service Information Technology Association) strand of the Joint World Congress of Social Work and Social Development global conference offer opportunities to introduce ideas and critique content across schools of social work globally. More opportunity to weigh the promise alongside the ethical issues is needed as educational technology emerges.

MOOCs in social work raise many questions for future research and discussion. For example, more information is needed on the impact of participation in MOOCs as well as the potential liabilities of engagement in MOOCs. Future research should examine how open-platform programs impact an educator's ability to properly follow-up or engage

participants in ongoing education. An additional area of scholarship should attend to the ethical implications of learning social work in an online space, especially of learning social work from MOOCs produced in the US. Scholars should explore the ethical issues in MOOCs, the underlying values in MOOCs, and if U.S.-produced MOOCs are sensitive to a global context. Finally, social work research should examine if MOOCs expand access to social work education, and if so, for whom.

A major limitation of this study is that, while we were only able to capture data on who enrolled and their motivations, we had much more limited information on who completed the MOOC and what they gained from their engagement. Additional research should explore the impact of participation on global learners: How does this shape their understanding and, potentially more interesting, how does a global perspective challenge U.S.-centric perspective (Literat, 2015)? An additional limitation is that the survey did not capture certain demographic questions (e.g., race/ethnicity) that are important to understand. Future research should ensure that these questions are added to understand the participant profile more thoroughly.

As the potential for this type of educational technology emerges, there is a need to track and understand the impact of MOOCs on traditional forms of social work education. Issues such as the impact of MOOCs on social work education, the value of MOOC credentials in the workplace, and the true costs and benefits of MOOCs are all important topics that deserve attention as other schools of social work engage in MOOCs.

In closing, MOOCs represent a new frontier for social work research, education, and practice and as such require schools to consider this innovation (Robbins et al., 2016). There are many questions to be answered and much more research is needed on the role of MOOCs within social work. However, while there are many unknowns, we are excited about the promise and potential impact of MOOCs, as well as their global reach. As we as a field continue to explore the use of technology innovations, we have the potential to unlock and harness new ways to conceptualize social work and to provide opportunities for new forms of learning for enhancing the field.

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