



Access to social work education:
Correlations between applicant performance
on selection tasks, demographics
and success as a student.

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Conclusions

This study supports existing literature:

- documenting the ineffectiveness of selection criteria for social work programmes
- addresses a gap in scholarship by examining the value of specific selection tools and measures.
- Factors that do correlate with student success suggest that being well-resourced as a student is paramount.
- Supporting students to succeed during the course of their study may be of higher value than attempting to select “suitable” students in the first place.

A single school case study of student selection process effectiveness

- The Bachelor of Social Practice (BSP) degree at Unitec was established in 1992.
- Until 2015 students enrolled in a three-year programme (if full time) providing a social work registerable qualification.
- At the start of 2014, when data entry for this study began, the BSP programme included 357 Effective Full Time Students (EFTS) and 22 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff (who also taught across two small postgraduate programmes).



Selection day activities and scoring

- activities for admission into the BSP degree included an individual interview, a team activity and a writing task.
- The activities chosen for SD reflect the nature of assessment used in the degree; written assessment, group presentations, and individual assessment in work-based activities.
- Once applicants finish SD, staff hold a review meeting where scores for all activities are recorded.
- Applicants with a combined score of 8 out of 15, or below are usually not admitted.



Methodology

- Data from 196 applicants to the Bachelor of Social Practice (2012-2103 cohorts) selected for analysis.
- Success was measured by considering course completion and grades across 8 courses which is equivalent to 1 years full time study.
- Correlational analyses were performed to address the research aim.



Research Aim

- To determine whether performance on SD activities is correlated with student success in the BSP.

Additionally the research also;

- Examined whether students' performance on SD tasks correlated with their success in the programme.
- Examined whether existing demographic data correlate with success, as these data represented potentially confounding variables.



Sample

- Applicant selection and demographic data were collected for three cohorts entering the programme in 2012 (November 2011, January/February 2012 and mid-year 2012)
- All students admitted during this time, including those who withdrew from the programme or did not complete particular courses, were included as participants (N = 196).
- All participants, including those enrolled part-time, had ample opportunity to complete all 8 courses included in the analysis before data entry for this project was complete.



Data analysis and findings

- Non-completions and student success
- Failing to complete a compulsory course by withdrawing after 75% of the course has been taught, or failing to submit work, indicates lack of success and results in a Did Not Complete (DNC) grade (fail).
- Of the 1568 opportunities (196 students × eight courses) to pass a course, 18.9% of them resulted in non-completion.
- A pass grade occurred for 78.8% of course opportunities, leaving only 2.3% for failures occurring due to the poor quality of assignment work submitted.
- To isolate the effects of the (79 students) who got a DNC on one or more courses, we examined correlations between selection day performance and grades with this group included and excluded from analyses.



Key Findings

- there is no simple formula for selecting students who will go on to complete their social work programme.
- tools used during the selection process are unreliable predictors of eventual student success.
- existing research is limited; further research is needed, particularly on the value of specific selection tools and measures.
- student success may depend on a complex set of factors including professional socialization; the assimilation of knowledge, values and skills pertaining to a profession into an individual's identity during their course of study.



Findings Summarised

- Performance on selection activities conducted as part of application to this degree do not correlate with course completions, and correlates only moderately with higher grades received for courses.
- Students who are wage-earning or self-employed on admission, studying full time, and/or admitted well before their studies begin are more likely to succeed.
- No other demographic factors are correlated with student success.

A word of caution

- Stricter measures have been consistently shown to exclude suitable students from programmes (Hughes et al., 2016).
- It is important that any selection tool is used in such a way that guards against the exclusion of students who could be supported to do well in their studies, and to become appropriately 'fit and proper' social work practitioners in the process.
- This issue is particularly important for a profession that espouses social justice, inclusion, and the possibility of transformative change

References for project

- Hughes, C. R., Gremillion, H., Bridgman, G., Ashley, P., & McNabb, D. (2017). Student selection process effectiveness: Correlations between task performance and undergraduate success. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, 29(4), 32-48. doi:10.11157/anzswj-vol29iss4id385
- Hughes, C. R. McNabb, D., Ashley, P. & Gremillion, H. (2016). What to Do About Student Selection for Social Work Programmes. *Social Work in Changing times: towards better outcomes*. Massey University: Palmerston North. 18-19 November.
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