



Synchronous or Asynchronous: Lessons Learned from Transitioning the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals Program to Remote Learning

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Synchronous or Asynchronous: Lessons Learned from Transitioning the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals Program to Remote Learning

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Abstract

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, (University of Windsor) swiftly adapted their Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program from in-person to online delivery. Conducting an extensive literature review, the paper compares existing online MSW programs while emphasizing the unique aspects of the MSWwp program. Using an explanatory lens, insights from School of Social Work faculty and staff highlight lessons learned during this transition. The results explore virtual academic integration, instructor training, technological support, and student satisfaction. This paper presents a pioneering, step-by-step model for the successful conversion of a Canadian graduate social work program from in-person to online.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries around the world shifted their teaching approach from in-person lectures to virtual learning, which utilizes all the means of modern technology (Daniel, 2020; Mirick, 2020). That said, the University of Windsor faced a unique challenge as by the time the pandemic hit North America in March 2020, course instructors and students were preparing for final examinations to take place. As the pandemic started to spread throughout Canada, the University of Windsor moved to an essential-service-only model; cancelled all in-person classes, labs, and final examinations; and required instructors to find alternative means of assessments to conclude the semester.

Located in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, the city is home to more than 217,188 people

(Statistics Canada, 2016). The University of Windsor has more than 16,321 students (University of Windsor, 2019). Located in Downtown Windsor, the School of Social Work offers Undergraduate (Bachelor) and Graduate (Master, Master for Working Professionals and PhD) programs. The Social Work for Working Professionals program offers two locations for students, Windsor and Peel.

While the end of winter semester was somewhat chaotic, the summer semester was much smoother thanks to the learning curve experienced by faculty and staff, graduate assistants, and students throughout the School of Social Work. This paper discusses lessons learned from the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals program's transition from in-person to remote learning. The paper will provide a description of the Master for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program, the general model and orientation, along with the detailed process of the program's transitions from in-person to online delivery.

Background of the study

Online Master of Social Work Programs

Online Master of Social Work programs existed in Canada long before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, as many provinces started implementing strict health guidelines and measures to compact the pandemic, the majority of universities switched their Master of Social Work programs to virtual delivery. This step enabled universities to offer remote learning but also ensure they were following the social and physical distancing requirements as set by provincial health authorities. The fast transition did not allow time for systematic review of promising practices or in-

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tentional planning for learning online. As the possibility of resuming in-person learning started appearing, the question remained as to whether differences in learning outcomes and experiences exist between in-person and online learning. To answer this question and understand how to best structure and evaluate the online MSWwp program, faculty at the School of Social Work are sharing their experience, lessons learned, and challenges observed in the in-person to online program transformation. The major themes presented in this paper will include the program's curriculum, instructors' training, technological assistance, and students' satisfaction in relation to transitioning the program online. The paper will present all those themes in the form of lessons learned from this experience.

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

Back in December 2019, the outbreak of a cluster of acute respiratory illness, now known as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), occurred in Wuhan, Hubei province and continued to spread rapidly throughout China (Wang et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic as measures of prevention and control became extremely serious (WHO, 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). While the origin of the COVID-19 is still being investigated, evidence suggests that the spread to humans occurred through illegal selling of wild animals in the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan, China (Chen et al., 2020). The nature of COVID-19 seems to likely affect older males who have existing health conditions and weaker immune systems (Chen et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2020). In early stages, patients experience severe acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), acute respiratory failure, and other serious complications very similar to other viruses that can cause multiple system infections in animals and respiratory tract infections in humans, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respira-

tory syndrome (MERS; Chen et al., 2020; Yin, 2018).

Purpose of the study

This paper aims to describe the steps taken by the University of Windsor, School of Social Work faculty and staff to transform the MSWwp program from in-person to online delivery. First, the paper provides an extensive literature review to describe other Master of Social Work programs' approaches to online curriculum delivery. The decision to include structures of other programs along with their outcomes was made to showcase similarities, differences, and the uniqueness of the MSWwp program at the University of Windsor.

Literature Review

Search Strategy

This paper searched ERIC, ProQuest Social Sciences, Social Work Abstracts, Social Service Abstracts, CINAHL, Proquest Nursing and Allied Health, and CBCA complete databases in order to locate studies that compared online and face-to-face Master of Social Work programs since 2009. Only peer reviewed studies in English were included. The reference list of each article found was reviewed, as well as all articles cited by those found from the search above. Lastly, specific relevant journals Canadian Social Work, Journal of Teaching in Social Work, and Social Work Education were manually reviewed. Once duplicates were removed, ten articles remained that compared online and in person Master of Social Work experiences.

Master of Social Work Programs

The studies reviewed in this paper do not all report equally on student demographics, and when they do, they do not always share the same information about the student bodies. In each of the programs, most of the students were white and female, with the excep-

tion of California State University, where students were majority female and Latina-identified (Brown & Park, 2016; Park, 2015). There was a mixture of employment statuses while in MSW programs, with some studies positing that online students may have more previous work experience and may be older than in person students (Cummings et al., 2013, 2015, 2019; Lawrence & Abel, 2013; Wilke et al., 2016).

Of the ten articles found, three reviewed the same program at the University of Tennessee, and two reviewed the program at California State University. The University of South Dakota, Florida State University, University of North Dakota, Baylor University in Texas, Salisbury University in Maryland, and a 'large Southeastern Public University' also had articles reviewing their online Master's program in some capacity in comparison to in-person education. Some articles reviewed whole program outcomes, while others focused on student experiences in only one course. Many articles were found discussing the nuances of teaching online, but there was a paucity of findings relating to studies that compared online and in person Master of Social Work programs. As in each program discussed, students self-selected into their stream of education; no randomized control trial studies were located. Further, while we are aware of online programs in Canada, no comparative experimental studies were found during this search.

The general overview of these studies suggests that there are few differences in outcomes based on mode of delivery, online versus in person, though significantly more study is needed to feel confident in these results. The good news is that scores improved throughout the Master of Social Work process, offering comfort that the degree is worthwhile for students. However, online programs reviewed had various blends of synchronous and asynchronous learning, including synchronous program and one program that was completely asynchronous (Park, 2015; Wilke et al., 2016). As research

continues to grow about the importance of student engagement in learning, findings that online learning is more interactive and more student-led are important (Cummings et al., 2013). The outcomes of each of the studies point to more research needed, specifically relating to the relationship(s) of sociodemographics and student outcomes. One especially interesting note comes from Lawrence and Abel (2013), that faculty may have success in developing strategies for advising that include inventories of learning styles and an overall snapshot of a student's context to best support them.

There was diversity in MSW program design, both in person and online, with a variety of synchronous and asynchronous offerings, including some hybrid within the same program. The University of Tennessee (Cummings et al., 2013, 2015, 2019) program has both synchronous and asynchronous programming inside its MSW online classes, along the same timelines as in person students, and one class has two Saturdays in person. During these online courses, students interact with each other through small labs and posted reactions online. California State University (Brown & Park 2016; Park; 2015) has its online program as completely asynchronous, with two eight-week classes at a time. Salisbury University in Maryland (Buchanan & Mathews, 2013) reviewed just one course in which the satellite students were 'in class' with instruction given both in-person and on-line, while students received the instructions from their computers. In Texas, Baylor University (Harris & Myers, 2016) students experienced a mixed methods model, with some students phoning in to join an online webinar during which others were live in the room. Lawrence and Abel (2013) explored a fully online clinical course in a large southeastern public university in the USA. Students at the University of North Dakota had an online program offered only part time, though the study was not clear as to the methodology of the program itself. Lastly, Florida State University (Wilke et al., 2016)

explored a crisis intervention course as an asynchronous online program. Overall, two studies reviewed asynchronous methods of teaching and learning, while others offered some combination of both.

Most of the articles cited used Blackboard as a tool for learning in both online and in person courses, though its use varied for in person learning. Saba Centra was also cited as a reference for online learning (Cummings et al., 2013). Lastly, one program (Cummings et al., 2013) made use of Second Life, a platform where students could create avatars for use during role play and other learning.

It was evident through the literature that different programs use different combinations of synchronous and asynchronous learning models not necessarily clearly spelled out in their studies. Further, some of these studies reviewed only one course, while others discussed outcomes of a whole program. There are many reasons why student experiences vary in classrooms, many of them due to factors outside of the academic environment, that are hard to control. While some of the aforementioned studies may have acknowledged that various demographics could influence results (for instance, older students exhibiting higher confidence due to more experience), not all explicitly controlled for these demographic variables during their reviews. Further, when results were found, effect sizes were small, as were total numbers of students surveyed, especially in some studies. This review was not able to locate and therefore include any Canadian comparative studies, which adds to the limitations of transferability of findings in these studies. Strengths, however, do exist in the variety of ways outcomes were reviewed, through both academic measures and student self-report, allowing for a wide array of feedback. Many of the studies note that the same faculty taught both classes, which is a strength, though of course, for those that used different instructors, once again there are many different factors relating to student out-

comes.

Materials & Methods

Study Design

The authors of this paper conducted an extensive review of the literature in which they highlighted how existing online Master of Social Work programs deliver their curriculum while showcasing the similarities, differences, and the uniqueness of the MSWwp program at the University of Windsor. The study's first author then employed an explanatory lens and conducted interviews with faculty and staff within the School of Social Work, at the University of Windsor, to highlight the lessons learned from their involvement in this transformative process. This was done through qualitative questions that inquired about the process which transformed the MSWwp program from an in-person to online setting.

The Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) Program

The MSWwp program at the University of Windsor is a fully accredited social work program by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education. The program is structured around the School of Social Work's mission that "...promotes social justice through quality professional education, advocacy, community partnerships, and the development and dissemination of knowledge through enquiry." (University of Windsor, n.d.). The program provides students with the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from a unique educational experience that will equip graduates to take on leadership roles in the field of social work.

The program values social justice principles, equity, diversity and inclusion, oppressed and vulnerable populations, the social work professional code of ethics, and a safe adult learning environment which increases professional behaviour in the field of social work. In recent years, the program prioritized establishing an Anti-Black Racism

Task Force which resulted in a Black scholars hiring initiative and an Anti-Black Racism initiatives fund.

The MSWwp Program's General Model

The MSWwp program is modeled after the full-time on-campus MSW program. However, students in the MSWwp program are enrolled in exclusive sections of these courses that are restricted to students in the MSWwp online program. Students in this program take a series of courses sequentially every semester. The MSWwp program is delivered online via Zoom on Fridays from 3:30PM to 9:00PM and Saturdays from 8:30AM to 4:00PM on alternating weekends. While the schedule above is rigorous, the very same schedule enables students to complete their course work and assignments in between course weekends.

The MSWwp program offers two streams: Regular Track and Advanced Track. Students who are entering the Regular Track hold a four-year honours bachelor's degree and will complete the program in 32 months. Students who are entering the Advanced Track hold a Bachelor of Social Work and will complete the program in 16 months.

The MSWwp program allows student-professionals to have an opportunity to share ideas, gain knowledge of best practices from other agencies and organizations, and learn from expert faculty members who come from diverse and strong academic and professional backgrounds. This allows students to transfer their new knowledge and skills back to their workplace after every weekend of teaching and interactions, therefore enhancing their applied learning experience. The program's ecological perspective model also prepares students for opportunities at all levels of social work practice by granting students the opportunity to focus their courses' assessments on area of interest in the field.

The MSWwp Program's Objective

The MSWwp program is based on the principles of the ecological perspective in

social work practice which include microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The program's objectives coexist with the School of Social Work's mission and social justice statements and the educational policies implemented by the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE).

The program's central goal is to cultivate practical skills and knowledge in its graduates, empowering them to assume leadership roles in both direct and indirect interactions with service users.. Further, the MSWwp program also offer students the opportunity to

- develop social work knowledge, values, and skills with vulnerable populations;
- incorporate knowledge in the application of critical thinking skills;
- understand and apply the theoretical basis of ecological systems perspective;
- employ social justice, empowerment, and cultural competency techniques;
- demonstrate the use of self with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- evaluate intervention techniques and develop and implement research projects; and
- demonstrate leadership in direct practice and indirect practice.

Findings and Lessons Learned

Program's Curriculum

The transformation of the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program from a traditional in-person instructional model to a fully online learning environment was a multifaceted undertaking that required meticulous adaptation of the academic structure and a comprehensive overhaul of course syllabi. This section delves into the noteworthy findings of this transformative process, exploring two distinct aspects: (a) "Adapting to the Academic Structure" and transitioning all to online learning in a compressed timeframe, and (a) "The Modification of Course Syllabi," with a

focus on individual faculty consultations and the recalibration of course content for the online milieu, particularly concerning the relevance and suitability of assignments and exams within the new digital landscape. Adapting to the Academic Structure described above and transitioning all to online learning in one weekend

The seismic shift from conventional in-person pedagogical practices to a virtual learning paradigm transpired in an extraordinarily condensed time frame—a mere weekend. This rapid transition necessitated a systematic and agile approach to several pivotal aspects:

Academic Structure Transition. The immediate migration of all educational activities to the online sphere demanded a re-evaluation and reconfiguration of the program's academic structure. Faculty members found themselves confronted with the exigency of recalibrating their instructional approaches and aligning them with the parameters of the virtual format. The overarching aim was to ensure seamless continuity in the delivery of course content.

Faculty and Student Learning Curve. This transition imposed a significant learning curve on all stakeholders within the academic community, including faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and students. The acquisition of proficiency in online platforms, the mastery of virtual communication tools, and the reimagining of teaching methodologies all constituted integral facets of this learning curve. The pandemic-induced pedagogical pivot also presented opportunities for novel and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Alternative Assessment Methods. In light of the abrupt cessation of in-person final examinations, educators were compelled to explore alternative methods of assessing student learning. This imperative led to the emergence of innovative assessment strategies, such as project-based evaluations, virtual presentations, and asynchronous online discussions. The transition thus catalyzed pedagogical creativity and diversification in

assessment practices.

The Modification of Course Syllabi

The recalibration of course syllabi emerged as a pivotal undertaking in ensuring the effective transition of the MSWwp program to the digital realm. This multifaceted process unfolded through several interrelated phases:

Faculty Consultations. The modification of course syllabi commenced with individual consultations with faculty members. These consultations served as a forum for in-depth discussions on the feasibility and implications of migrating courses to the online format. The objective was to discern the distinctive prerequisites and challenges associated with each course, thereby facilitating tailored solutions.

Content Transfer to Online Format. The subsequent phase entailed the meticulous transfer of existing course content to the virtual domain. Faculty members undertook the intricate task of reimagining their course materials, lectures, readings, assignments, and assessments to align seamlessly with the digital milieu. This process underscored the significance of pedagogical adaptability.

Applicability of Assignments and Exams. A paramount consideration during the syllabi modification process was the evaluation of the relevance and suitability of assignments and exams within the online context. Faculty members undertook the intricate task of ensuring that assessments remained academically robust, pedagogically meaningful, and congruent with course objectives, all while being conducive to the online learning environment.

Maintaining Academic Standards. Amidst the transition, preserving the program's exacting academic standards remained a cardinal imperative. The modifications to course syllabi were meticulously executed with an unwavering commitment to upholding the program's hallmark of academic excellence. The overarching aim was to ensure that students continued to receive a rigorous and

comprehensive educational experience, irrespective of the shift to online delivery.

Instructors' Training. The cornerstone of the instructors' training regimen was the meticulously designed Instructor's Orientation, a structured and multifaceted program that equipped faculty members with the requisite skills and knowledge for effective online teaching. This orientation program unfolded through three integral components:

Program Orientation

Faculty members embarked on a dedicated program orientation, a foundational element of the Instructor's Orientation. This component provided educators with a comprehensive overview of the MSWwp program's intricacies, including its mission, core values, and overarching goals. The orientation elucidated the program's commitment to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, underscoring the significance of its professional code of ethics and the creation of a safe adult learning environment. Notably, recent initiatives, such as the Anti-Black Racism Task Force, were highlighted, affirming the program's dedication to promoting equitable educational opportunities.

Learning Management Systems Orientation (D2L Brightspace) A pivotal aspect of the Instructor's Orientation was the in-depth exploration of the Learning Management System (LMS) employed by the program—D2L Brightspace. Faculty members were systematically acquainted with the functionalities, features, and tools embedded within this robust platform. This orientation component ensured that educators possessed the requisite proficiency to navigate the LMS seamlessly, enabling them to deliver course materials, engage with students, and administer assessments effectively.

Video Conferencing Systems Orientation (Zoom) In the era of virtual learning, the mastery of video conferencing systems emerged as an indispensable skill set for faculty members. As such, the third component of the Instructor's Orientation was dedicated to familiarizing educators with the intricacies

of Zoom, the chosen video conferencing platform. Faculty members delved into the nuances of scheduling, hosting, and participating in virtual meetings and lectures. This orientation not only facilitated synchronous online interactions but also enhanced the overall instructional quality by enabling educators to harness the full potential of virtual communication.

The department has developed a set of invaluable templates aimed at assisting instructors in the challenging task of transitioning their teaching methods to an online environment. These templates, collectively known as "Templates for Online Delivery Model - Teaching Pedagogy and Methodology for Curriculum Leads," have been meticulously designed to ensure effective and engaging online instruction. Whether you are converting existing face-to-face courses to an online format or seeking a flexible structure for remote learning, these templates offer comprehensive guidance. They provide detailed daily schedules, emphasizing a balanced mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities, incorporating breaks, discussions, and opportunities for student engagement. These templates are a testament to the department's commitment to providing educators with the tools they need to navigate the evolving landscape of online education successfully.

Example One: Converting Existing Face-to-Face Structure to an Online Structure.

The first template (Appendix A) offers a detailed daily schedule for online instruction. It includes a mix of synchronous and asynchronous components to ensure students' engagement while accommodating their learning preferences. The schedule for Day 1 from 3:30 PM to 9:00 PM involves introductions, course overview, syllabus review, lectures, breakout rooms, and breaks. It emphasizes a balanced approach, incorporating dinner and structured lecture-discussion-break sequences. Readings assigned before class set the

foundation for meaningful discussions and activities.

Example Two: Possible Structure of Remote Learning Space – Synchronous Large Group/Small Group and Asynchronous Individual/Small Group Learning Activities.

The second template (Appendix B) provides a flexible structure for remote learning, allowing for synchronous large group and small group activities, as well as asynchronous individual and small group tasks. This template incorporates ample breaks to ensure students' physical and mental well-being. On Day 1, it includes large Zoom room sessions for questions, instruction, discussions, and breakout room activities. Breaks are interspersed for stretching and relaxation. Additionally, students engage in individual asynchronous activities, such as video reflections, case studies, and discussion posts. The schedule fosters collaboration, reflection, and interaction while considering students' responsibilities and needs, with structured sessions ending in group discussions and further individual activities. Day 2 follows a similar pattern, with role plays and a focus on practical skills development, followed by breaks and group discussions. The schedule also allows for extended lunchtime to accommodate students' responsibilities due to COVID-19. This flexible and adaptable structure aims to optimize student engagement and learning outcomes.

Curriculum Leads

Within the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program at the School of Social Work, Curriculum Leads hold a pivotal role in orchestrating the uniformity and excellence of academic curriculum delivery across various program sections. Their journey begins with a mandatory orientation program, a foundational step that empowers them with essential knowledge and competencies necessary for their roles. These Curriculum Leads are entrusted with

the responsibility of standardizing curriculum content to ensure its seamless alignment with the mission and values of the School of Social Work. They actively promote a consistent and enthusiastic approach to curriculum delivery, emphasizing the cultivation of a dynamic learning environment that embodies the institution's dedication to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In addition to their role as curriculum advocates, Curriculum Leads play a vital role in educating instructors on university standards, policies, and procedures. This educational support extends to fostering effective communication among instructors across all program sections. Through regular and collaborative engagement, Curriculum Leads facilitate a shared understanding of the program's academic rigor and integrity, contributing to uniformity in instructional delivery. Furthermore, as the educational landscape evolves towards online instruction, Curriculum Leads are well prepared to navigate the intricacies of teaching in the digital realm. Their adaptability underscores their commitment to ensuring that the MSWwp program maintains a consistent, exceptional, and equitable educational experience for all students, regardless of the instructional format. In essence, Curriculum Leads within the MSWwp program serve as central figures in upholding academic excellence, sustaining curriculum consistency, and nurturing a collaborative and supportive educational community.

Administrative Staff and their Roles

The efficient operation of the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program relies heavily on the coordinated efforts of the administrative staff who assume pivotal roles in the program's organization. This section delves into the roles and responsibilities of the administrative staff, encompassing their involvement in organizing mandatory orientations, enrolling students in different course sections, liaising with Curriculum Leads and instructors, managing essential resources such as Brightspace courses and Zoom licenses, and serving as

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intermediaries between Human Resources and the program's and instructors' needs.

One of the crucial responsibilities of the administrative staff within the MSWwp program is the orchestration of mandatory orientations. These orientations serve as foundational pillars for various stakeholders, including students and Curriculum Leads, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and resources to navigate the program successfully. Administrative staff meticulously plan and execute these orientations, ensuring that all participants receive comprehensive information about program expectations, resources, and support structures. Through these orientations, students and instructors are acclimated to the program's mission, values, and academic requirements, fostering a sense of preparedness and community engagement.

Administrative staff also play a pivotal role in enrolling students in different course sections, aligning them with the program's academic structure. This involves a systematic and organized process of assigning students to their respective sections, taking into consideration various factors such as program entry points and individual preferences. By efficiently managing student enrollment, administrative staff ensure that each section maintains a balanced composition of students, promoting diversity and equitable learning experiences. Furthermore, they serve as primary points of contact for students, addressing inquiries, facilitating course changes, and providing ongoing support throughout the program journey.

The administrative staff within the MSWwp program undertake the essential task of resource management, encompassing the requisition of Brightspace courses, Zoom licenses, and other technological assets necessary for seamless program delivery. They collaborate with relevant stakeholders to ensure that instructors and students have access to the requisite digital tools and platforms. Additionally, administrative staff liaise with external vendors and internal departments to secure the necessary resources and licenses,

streamlining the program's technological infrastructure. This proactive resource management ensures that the program remains technologically robust, facilitating effective online instruction.

Finally, administrative staff serve as intermediaries between Human Resources (HR) and the specific needs of the MSWwp program and its instructors. They bridge the gap between HR policies and program requirements, facilitating a smooth interface between these domains. By advocating for program-specific needs and ensuring compliance with HR regulations, administrative staff contribute to the program's operational efficiency and instructors' support. They play a crucial role in mediating HR-related processes, such as hiring and onboarding of instructors, and act as advocates for program-specific considerations within the larger organizational framework.

Technological Assistance

To bolster faculty members and instructors in their endeavors, they were provided with essential technological support and training. This intervention proved instrumental in facilitating the seamless integration of digital tools and platforms into course delivery, enriching the overall online learning experience.

Program Attendants

Within the framework of the MSWwp program, Program Attendants play a pivotal role in supporting instructors with the technological aspects of course delivery, particularly when utilizing Zoom. These paid student assistants are an essential component of the program's commitment to facilitating seamless online learning experiences. Program Attendants are readily available to attend online courses whenever advised by instructors, serving as immediate sources of technological assistance for both faculty members and students in attendance. Their responsibilities encompass resolving connection issues, troubleshooting multimedia problems, admit-

ting students to the online sessions, and facilitating the creation of breakout rooms. This dedicated support ensures that technology-related challenges are swiftly addressed, promoting uninterrupted learning experiences and enhancing the overall effectiveness of online instruction.

Interdepartmental Help

The MSWwp program thrives on the spirit of interdepartmental collaboration, harnessing the collective experience and expertise across various university units to create a holistic and enriching educational environment. This collaborative ethos extends beyond administrative processes and resource management, encompassing the program's ability to draw upon the wealth of knowledge and practices from diverse university departments. It is through this collaborative synergy that the program optimally coordinates mandatory orientations, efficiently manages student enrollment, and strategically allocates resources. By borrowing insights and best practices from across the university's collective experience, the MSWwp program ensures that its operational efficiency, student support, and academic excellence remain at the forefront of its mission.

This collaborative spirit extends to the alignment of HR policies with program-specific needs, fostering a seamless integration of university-wide processes. It serves as a testament to the program's commitment to not only adapt to the changing landscape of higher education but also to actively contribute to the university's culture of excellence. In essence, interdepartmental collaboration within the MSWwp program represents a dynamic exchange of ideas, experiences, and strategies, all aimed at enhancing the overall educational journey of its students. Top of Form Bottom of Form

Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) stands as a formidable partner in the pursuit of academic excellence within the University of Windsor's MSWwp program.

Collaborating closely with faculty, staff, and students across campus, the CTL champions a culture of scholarly and effective teaching. This culture values, recognizes, practices, and rewards teaching that is grounded in research and reflective practice, ultimately enhancing and inspiring student learning. The CTL offers a comprehensive range of services to individuals, groups, departments, administrators, and faculties, all aimed at establishing instructional conditions that foster student engagement, ensure student success, and contribute to the development of vibrant and enriching programs of study. These services encompass instructional design, pedagogical innovation, faculty development, and the promotion of evidence-based teaching practices. The CTL's unwavering commitment to excellence aligns seamlessly with the MSWwp program's dedication to providing a dynamic and enriching educational journey for its students.

Students' Satisfaction Surveys

The transition of the MSWwp program to an online format has been a significant endeavor, and the student surveys conducted over the course of Winter, Summer, and Fall 2021 provide compelling evidence of its success. These surveys serve as a valuable indicator of students' perspectives on the online program, shedding light on various aspects that are crucial for program evaluation and improvement.

One consistent theme across the surveys is the high level of satisfaction among students with the approachability and helpfulness of instructors. In all three reports, a substantial majority of students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that instructors in the online format were approachable and helpful. This positive sentiment underscores the faculty's adaptability and commitment to maintaining a supportive learning environment, even in the virtual realm.

Moreover, the surveys indicate that the online classes have been conducive to learning for a significant proportion of students.

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While opinions varied, with some students expressing concerns, a substantial number of respondents agreed that the online format did not hinder their ability to learn effectively. This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates the successful integration of digital tools and strategies into the curriculum, fostering an engaging and productive learning experience.

The MSWwp program's efforts to foster a safe and welcoming community were also well received by students, with a majority in all three surveys strongly agreeing with this statement. This outcome reflects the program's dedication to creating a supportive virtual community, where students can connect, collaborate, and feel at ease despite the online learning environment.

Furthermore, the positive feedback regarding the School of Social Work's customer service and program delivery is indicative of the program's commitment to excellence. Students' acknowledgment of the school's effectiveness in these areas underscores the institution's dedication to providing a quality educational experience, even during the transition to online learning.

Lessons Learned When Stories Are Told: The MSWwp Program's Faculty Lessons

The presence of invaluable lessons learned throughout this transition are critical to highlight as the lessons emerge from key leaders and scholars at The School of Social Work, including the Director, the MSWwp Program's Academic Coordinator, and the MSWwp Program Field and Academic Advisor. Their insights and experiences have been instrumental in navigating the transition to online learning, addressing challenges, and evolving the curriculum to meet the changing needs of students and the demands of accreditation standards. These lessons not only highlight the adaptability and resilience of the educational program but also serve as a testament to the commitment to providing an inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education in the ever-evolving landscape of social

work education.

Face-to-Face Delivery: Understanding Student Preferences. The transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic brought forth a valuable lesson regarding the importance of understanding and accommodating student preferences. While the program's swift shift to an online format was necessary, the academic team, in hindsight, recognized the significance of conducting a pretransition survey to gauge students' reservations about the online delivery method. This proactive measure could have allowed for the identification of potential challenges, particularly among students who had initially experienced in-person learning. Such insight might have informed a more gradual introduction to the online program, which could have mitigated resistance and facilitated a smoother adjustment period for these students.

Synchronous or Asynchronous: Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning The transition to online learning brought to the fore the question of whether to adopt synchronous or asynchronous learning methods. A valuable lesson learned was the importance of striking a balance between these two approaches to meet the diverse needs of students. By introducing both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities, the program catered to students' varying schedules and learning preferences. This balanced approach allowed students the flexibility to engage with course material at their own pace through asynchronous activities while also participating in live sessions when it suited their schedules.

Structure and Predictability: Adapting to Working Professionals' Needs The student body of the program primarily consisted of working professionals with a range of responsibilities, including family care. To address their unique needs, maintaining structure and predictability was crucial. Lessons learned underscored the significance of structuring the program to include well-defined schedules, including set lunch

and dinner times. This predictability allowed students to effectively plan their personal responsibilities around their studies, contributing to their overall success.

Staffing Requirements: Anticipating Enrollment Growth

As the program's popularity led to a substantial increase in student enrollment, the academic team recognized the need for proactive planning. The lesson learned was the importance of anticipating staffing requirements to maintain program quality and stability. With the rapid growth in student numbers, the program needed to hire a significant number of part-time faculty. This prompted considerations about enrollment limits until the hiring of full-time faculty became feasible. Subsequently, the academic team proposed the hiring of full-time faculty to ensure greater program stability, ultimately receiving approval for this essential expansion after two years.

Standardizing Curriculum and Curriculum Leads: Ensuring Consistency and Quality

To ensure consistency and maintain quality in the program's curriculum, the introduction of curriculum leads proved invaluable. Lessons learned emphasized their critical role in aligning online course content with the standards set by the Canadian Association of Social Work Education. Curriculum Leads were responsible for overseeing syllabi for each course section, approving materials, and ensuring that course content in the online program remained identical to that delivered in the on-campus program. This systematic approach not only facilitated compliance with accreditation standards but also instilled confidence among online students in the program's quality.

Immediate Response to Student Concerns: Prioritizing Student Support

The transition to online learning highlighted the significance of providing immediate responses to student inquiries and concerns. Lessons learned underscored the need for streamlined systems through which students could express their concerns and receive timely assistance. Responding quickly with

effective solutions to students' needs was essential to prevent issues from escalating. To facilitate this, the program incorporated an emphasis on knowledge of university services into introductory training for students, faculty, and Curriculum Leads.

Concerns about Racism in the Classroom: Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity

Issues related to racism in the classroom emphasized the importance of promoting diversity and inclusivity within the program. Lessons learned underscored that fostering an inclusive learning environment should extend beyond the classroom to encompass faculty representation. Diverse faculty backgrounds became a priority to ensure that faculty composition reflected the program's commitment to diversity. Efforts were made to expose students to instructors from varied backgrounds, including racialized individuals, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and women.

Concerns about Curriculum Content: Staying Current with Accreditation Standards

To address concerns about curriculum content and alignment with accreditation standards, the program undertook a comprehensive curriculum review. This review aimed to ensure that the curriculum remained up-to-date and responsive to pressing societal issues, such as colonialism, Indigenous peoples' concerns, and antiracism. Lessons learned emphasized the need for ongoing curriculum evaluation to ensure that course content met evolving accreditation standards. Curriculum revision, including the integration of Indigenous perspectives and cultural sensitivity, was undertaken to better prepare students for a more inclusive and equitable social work practice. Ongoing training for both students and faculty, covering topics such as racism, microaggressions, and Anti-Black Racism, was also introduced, reflecting the program's commitment to promoting inclusivity and equity.

Online Communication Challenges: Fostering Effective Online Communication
Navigating the online learning environment revealed several challenges, particularly re-

lated to effective online communication. Lessons learned emphasized the importance of adopting proactive strategies to overcome these challenges. Vigilance regarding online communication and responses to expressed differences or concerns became essential. Training in online communication was incorporated into student and instructor orientations. The program recognized that the online environment provided fewer opportunities for students to get to know one another and their instructors. Therefore, the academic team and instructors implemented community-building activities, even in the virtual realm, to foster meaningful connections among students and between students and faculty.

Final Remarks

The lessons learned from the transition of the program from traditional face-to-face instruction to a robust online learning environment have laid the foundation for continuous enhancement and adaptability. These insights are not only instrumental for the program's future development but also offer valuable guidance to educational institutions undergoing similar academic transitions. The significance of understanding student preferences, achieving a balance between asynchronous and synchronous learning, accommodating working professionals' needs, and anticipating staffing requirements has been recognized and integrated into the program's operational framework. Moreover, the commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity in both faculty and curriculum content aligns with evolving accreditation standards, ensuring that graduates are prepared for a rapidly changing world. The emphasis on immediate responses to student concerns and the proactive promotion of effective online communication strategies serve as additional hallmarks of excellence. By embracing these lessons, the program remains at the forefront of innovative online education, committed to delivering a dynamic and enriching educational experience for its students while serving as an exemplary model for others navi-

gating similar academic transitions.

Limitations

While this research paper has provided valuable insights into the transition of the MSWwp program to an online format and its impact on student satisfaction, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the survey data collected for this study are based on self-reported responses and surveys from students. While these responses offer valuable qualitative information about their experiences, they may be subject to response bias. Students who had particularly positive or negative experiences with online learning may be more motivated to participate in surveys, potentially skewing the results in one direction. Additionally, the surveys predominantly capture students' perceptions and attitudes, which may not always align with objective measures of academic performance or learning outcomes.

Second, the data presented in this paper are limited to a specific timeframe in 2021, encompassing the Winter, Summer, and Fall terms. The circumstances surrounding online education were evolving rapidly during this period due to external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the findings may not fully capture the long-term effects and sustainability of the online program, or the potential refinements made by the institution in response to changing circumstances. A more comprehensive assessment would require continued data collection and analysis over several years to track trends and ensure that the observed outcomes persist over time. Finally, it is imperative for the authors of this study to acknowledge that the findings from our research are limited to a single university and program, specifically the University of Windsor's Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program. Given the unique and condensed nature of the

MSWwp program, it becomes challenging to generalize curriculum-related findings in this study to programs designed or planned to be implemented similarly. However, it is

worth noting that the findings pertaining to instructors' training and technological support can serve as valuable guidelines for transitioning various social work programs into the virtual learning environment.

Conclusion

In support of the transition to the online program, this study draws upon the valuable feedback collected through student surveys conducted during the Winter, Summer, and Fall of 2021 at the University of Windsor within the Master of Social Work for Working Professionals (MSWwp) program. The findings from these surveys reflect a consistent pattern of positive sentiment among students. Across all three terms, a substantial majority of students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the MSWwp program was meeting their expectations. Additionally, students found instructors to be approachable and helpful, considered course materials timely and informative, and viewed online classes as conducive to learning. This positive perception extended to the program's ability to foster a safe and welcoming community, with a significant number of students indicating that they would recommend the program to others. These consistently positive survey results underscore the successful adaptation of the MSWwp program to the online learning environment, highlighting its effectiveness in maintaining a high-quality educational experience.

As the MSWwp program underwent this transformation, several significant lessons emerged. First, recognizing the importance of consulting with students who had previously experienced face-to-face learning and conducting surveys to gauge their concerns and preferences before the transition could have helped address potential resistance and tailor the online program to better meet their needs. Furthermore, the delicate balance between synchronous and asynchronous learning was crucial to accommodate diverse student

schedules, and providing a structured daily routine was essential for working students with family responsibilities. The expansion of the program led to staffing challenges, indicating the necessity of hiring full-time faculty to ensure stability. Curriculum standardization and a vigilant approach to addressing student concerns also played pivotal roles in ensuring the program's excellence. The MSWwp program's proactive response to concerns about racism in the classroom and the inclusion of relevant content is noteworthy, aligning with updated accreditation standards.

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Lessons Learned from Transitioning the MSWwp Program to Remote Learning

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Teaching Pedagogy and Methodology for Curriculum Leads Template for Adaptions of Face-to-Face Instruction to Online Delivery

Example One

Converting Existing Face-to-Face Structure to an Online Structure (Format of Delivery)

Course will be a combination of synchronous and asynchronous lectures, large group and small group discussions, and in-class group assignments. Readings will be assigned prior to the class to provide a foundation for class discussions of context, integration, and application of concepts. The course will be taught from an ecological perspective and will cover a range of social work roles in indirect practice.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3, 4, 5, 6
3:30 to 9:00 PM Content Introductions (15 min) 3:30 to 3:45 pm Course overview (10 min) Review of syllabus (20 min) Course expectations (15 min) 3:45 to 4:30 pm Break (20 minutes) 4:30 to 4:50 pm Lecture (30 min) 4:50 to 5:20 pm Breakout Rooms (30 min) 5:20 to 5:50 pm Dinner (60 min) 5:50 AM to 6:50 PM Lecture (40 min) 6:50 to 7:30 pm Breakout Rooms (30 min) 7:30 to 8:00 pm Break (20 min) 8:00 to 8:20 pm Lecture (30 min) 8:20 to 8:50 pm Class Wrap-up 8:50 to 9 PM Preparation for Class Readings	8:30 to 4 PM Content Introduction of Day 8:30 to 8:45 AM Community Practice: Overview and Models for Practice Lecture (40 min) 8:45 to 9:25 AM Breakout Rooms (30 min) 9:25 to 9:55 AM Break (20 min) 9:55 to 10:15 AM Lecture (40 min) 10:15 to 10:55 AM Class Discussion (30 min) 10:55 to 11:25 AM Lunch (60 min) 11:25 AM to 12:25 PM Community Practice: Models for Practice (Lecture 40 min) 12:25 to 1:05 PM Breakout Rooms with Assignment (30 min) 1:05 to 1:35 PM Class Discussion (30 min) 1:35 to 2:05 PM Break (20 minutes) 2:05 to 2:25 PM Community Practice: Models for Practice (Lecture 40 min) 2:25 to 3:05 PM Breakout Rooms with Assignment (30 min) 3:05 to 3:35 PM Class Discussion (20 min) 3:35 to 3:55 PM Class Wrap-up 3:55 to 4:00 PM Preparation for Class Readings	<i>(Customized by the instructor)</i>

APPENDICES

Appendix B

**Teaching Pedagogy and Methodology for Curriculum Leads
Template for Adaptions of Face-to-Face Instruction to Online Delivery**

Example Two

Possible Structure of Remote Learning Space – Synchronous Large Group/Small Group and Asynchronous Individual/Small Group Learning Activities

Note – the timelines in the chart for Friday and Saturday are what I use as a general guide. I vary them based on the content and students’ needs.

<p>≥ 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – time for questions about assignments followed by a combination of instruction from me (Power Points, review of documents, I role play with student volunteers) + large group discussion + small group breakout room (BO) activities/discussions</p>
<p>➤ 4:30 pm – 4:45 pm</p>	<p>Break (15 mins – stretch break) (I encourage the students to physically get up and take a full break away from their computer/laptop – give their body, eyes and brain a break.)</p>
<p>➤ 4:45 pm – 5:45 pm</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – as above</p>
<p>➤ 5:45 pm – 7:15 pm NOTE - *This extended time has worked well to give students time to be with their families, helping with young children or dependent adult/seniors, and/or the various responsibilities they have on their plates now due to COVID-19.</p>	<p>Dinner break (1 hour; 5:45 pm – 6:45 pm) + Individual asynchronous activities (typically 30 mins) I create a document outlining varied activities about the content of the evening – students apply their learning. Students can complete the activities prior to the weekend OR during the scheduled time allocated for individual asynchronous activities. Usually 2-3 different activities are outlined and a clear time length each activity should take is included.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activities consist of: ● Viewing a YouTube video, or video accessible through Leddy Library / Kanopy, and writing a guided reflection on content/learning ● Guided reflection on content/reading for the weekend <p>Case study – with prompting questions for students to engage with Discussion posts – students create a thread and respond to at least 1 other student’s post (discussion topics are clearly outlined – content and focus, length, netiquette). The time at which students should come back to the large Zoom room is posted and highlighted at the end of the document outlining the individual activities – for example: <i>NOTE – We will return to the large group at 7:15 pm.</i></p>

Lessons Learned from Transitioning the MSWwp Program to Remote Learning

<p>➤ 7:15 pm - 7:45 pm Small Group Activities in BO Rooms (until 7:45 pm)</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – student move into BO rooms. Small Group Activity (30 mins) • In small groups students discuss the individual activities. I provide a document with an outline of small group activities and timeline. Involves debriefing about individual activities and the creating of a document of their small group discussion and indicating a spokesperson to relate key points of their small group discussion to the large group. A time at which students should come back to the large Zoom room is posted and highlighted on the small group activity document also. I visit each of the breakout rooms to answer questions or provide commentary. On the first Friday night of the course when we are reviewing the format of the course, I let them know that I will visit each BO Room if they have questions, etc. At the bottom of the documents outlining the individual activities and small group activities, I provide a statement about how the students can contact me if they need assistance during the designated activities – <i>If you need assistance or have a question – send me a message through the Zoom Chat, and I will reply.</i></p>
<p>➤ Remainder of the evening 7:45 pm - 8:45 pm</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room - Students meet back in the large Zoom room – we briefly discuss the individual/small group activities + combination of instruction from me (Power Points) + large group discussion (mini review and discussion of agenda for Saturday).</p>

Day 2- Saturday

<p>➤ 8:30 am – 9:30 am</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – as described for Friday</p>
<p>➤ 9:30 am – 9:45 am</p>	<p>Break (15 mins – stretch break)</p>
<p>➤ 9:45 am – 10:45 am</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – as described for Friday BO Rooms – Student Role Plays – practicing skills</p>
<p>➤ 10:45 am – 11:00 am</p>	<p>Break (15 mins – stretch break)</p>
<p>➤ 11:00 am – 12:00 pm</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – as described for Friday BO Rooms – Student Role Plays – practicing skills</p>
<p>➤ 12:00 pm – 1:30 pm (Extended time for lunch and individual activities – students have a good amount of time for their responsibilities due to COVID-19.)</p>	<p>Lunch break (1 hour; 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm) + Individual asynchronous activities (30 mins) Students generally return to the large Zoom room around 1:30 pm.</p>
<p>➤ 1:30 pm – 2:00 pm Small Group Activities in BO Rooms (until 2:00 pm)</p>	<p>Large Zoom Room – student move then the class into breakout rooms for small group activities Small Group Activity (30 mins)</p>
<p>➤ 2:00 pm – 2:15 pm</p>	<p>Break (15 mins – stretch break)</p>
<p>➤ 2:15 pm – 3:00 pm</p>	<p>Large Zoom room discussion of the individual/small group activities + as above – previous description of Large Zoom room</p>
<p>➤ 3:00 pm – 3:45 pm</p>	<p>Continued Large Zoom room content if needed. Preferred use of this time – giving students time to work on group assignment in pre-assigned BO rooms. I visit the BO rooms until the class ends. I leave the BO rooms open until 4:30 pm for groups that want to continue to work after the class ends, and I remain in the large Zoom room until 4:30 pm to answer questions.</p>