Professional Development:
The International Journal of
Continuing Social Work Education

| | |
|---|---|
| **Journal:** | Professional Development:<br>The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education |
| **Article Title:** | *Notes from the Field: The COVID Cohort: Social Work Students' Perspectives of Virtual Learning During the 2020 Pandemic* |
| **Author(s):** | *Fitzpatrick, Jauer, Scallon* |
| **Volume and Issue Number:** | *Vol.25 No.1* |
| **Manuscript ID:** | *251017* |
| **Page Number:** | *17* |
| **Year:** | *2022* |

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work or its Center for Social and Behavioral Research.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published two times a year (Spring and Winter) by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research at 1923 San Jacinto, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.



ISSN: 1097-4911

**URL: www.profdevjournal.org** **Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact**

# Notes from the Field: The COVID Cohort: Social Work Students' Perspectives of Virtual Learning During the 2020 Pandemic

*Fitzpatrick, Jauer and Scallon*


**Abstract**

This paper will explore some of the challenges and benefits to postsecondary online learning during COVID-19 from the perspective of current social work students. Research related to online learning in synchronous and asynchronous formats is discussed, as well as the personal experiences and observations of undergraduate and graduate students at schools of social work in two universities. Topics include accessibility related to disability, race, socioeconomic status, and geographical factors. Recommendations for faculty teaching future online cohorts are made related to the structure and policies often present in synchronous and asynchronous online classes.



Keywords: COVID-19, post-secondary online learning, synchronous, asynchronous, social work education


## Introduction

Spring Break 2020 coincided with near-universal closures of college and university campuses throughout the United States and much of the world. From a historical perspective, this was not unprecedented. The 1918 influenza pandemic, to which COVID-19 has often been compared, resulted in closures and quarantines at colleges that lasted weeks or months (Kambhampaty, 2020), with many schools either shutting down classes altogether or attempting to continue remotely through the use of telephones and mail-in assignments (Waters, 2020). Although the technology has advanced in the past century, the urgency around how to continue higher education during a crisis of this magnitude feels very much the same.

In March 2020, social work faculty and placement sites scrambled to modify field placements that would meet the requirements set by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) while still protecting the health and safety of social work interns. Some universities had robust online learning platforms and field alternatives already in place and were able to transition to being fully remote almost seamlessly. Other programs grappled with how to move an exclusively campus-based education to a format that many faculty had little experience in navigating, compounded with not yet being fully supported by the existing technology on their campuses. With just over six weeks remaining in the semester, social work students became increasingly anxious due to not knowing whether they could complete their field hours due to reduced opportunities and agency closures, a wide range in the level of communication and conflicting information received from their universities, and the demands of some field placements that did not immediately acknowledge the risks of continuing onsite internship placements. These concerns were reflected in more than a dozen petitions circulated on Change.org beginning March 16, 2020, with one petition collecting over 10,000 signatures from social work students and faculty across the United States, imploring their universities and CSWE to reduce their field hours and requirements so that students could graduate in May as planned (Change.org, 2020).

On March 25, 2020, CSWE released a statement that included an allowance to temporarily reduce required field hours and to include internet-based remote tasks as acceptable field activities (CSWE, 2020). Most colleges and universities quickly followed suit, with more flexibility in assignments that would meet the requirements for field hours, adoption of internet-based remote work practices already common in professions outside of academia, and a shift from in-person to online classes via videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

Due to recent transitions to distanced learning, social work faculty and students have had to adapt to a variety of new environments including synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid courses. Synchronous classes, also referred to as virtual learning, are classes that are primarily conducted


*Katrina L. Fitzpatrick, MSSW Candidate, Administration and Policy Practice, at The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work*
*Hadley Jauer, BSW Student, Texas State University School of Social Work*
*Drake E. Scallon, MSW Student, Texas State University School of Social Work*

in real time via the use of videoconferencing platforms and are often supplemented with assignments that are uploaded to an online university learning platform such as Blackboard or Canvas. Asynchronous learning, which was the most common structure for online classes prior to the pandemic, consists of instruction that has been prerecorded or otherwise prepared in advance by the professor and which students can access on online university learning platforms during times that are most convenient to them, as long as they meet any deadlines for assignments. Asynchronous classes usually have minimal requirements for direct, real-time contact between students and their professors, but often include discussions conducted over email or text-based message boards. For the purposes of this paper, "traditional classes" refers to in-person, campus-based instruction. Hybrid courses consist of class instruction that is any combination of online synchronous, online asynchronous, and traditional classes. From an ecological perspective, successful outcomes of social work education are dependent upon the commitment, community, and culture of the particular school of social work, faculty experience, knowledge, passion, delivery, and individual learning capabilities (Dalton, 2018; Groton & Spadola, 2020; Smith, Jeffery, & Collins, 2018; Smith, 2015). Despite these challenging circumstances, social work educators have a unique opportunity to lead future social work students in new online learning environments.

For students who are continuing their education at the undergraduate or graduate levels, the solution for how to proceed amid a continuing pandemic continues to unfold. Online asynchronous social work degree programs that were in place prepandemic have remained largely unchanged, with most adjustments being related to the temporary modifications to field placement requirements approved by CSWE (2020). Many traditionally campus-based programs decided early on to remain fully online at least through the end of 2020, with most of those ultimately extending through the spring or summer 2021 semesters. Some cancelled their summer 2020 semesters to allow for time to transition to new and emerging technologies. Still others returned to a fully on-campus or hybrid format that required—or strongly "encouraged"—faculty and students to return to their classrooms despite concerns stemming from warnings from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that returning to campus was a major risk factor in the continuing spread of COVID-19 (Sullivan & Green, 2020).

**About the Authors**

The authors of this paper are three current social work students in undergraduate or graduate degree programs at two different universities, all of whom have successfully taken classes prepandemic in both online-asynchronous and traditional on-campus formats. All are currently enrolled full-time in classes that are traditional, asynchronous, synchronous, or a hybrid of some or all of these. One author, a non-traditional student in their mid-40s, equally split their total undergraduate credits between online asynchronous classes and traditional classes at a community college and a university before beginning their Bachelor of Social Work field placement in Spring 2020 (including the mid-semester transition to virtual learning and remote field placement) then enrolled in an advanced-placement Master of Social Work program at another university that has temporarily transitioned from being a traditional on-campus program to a synchronous, virtual format. Another author is a third-year social work undergraduate in their early 20s who had the majority of their pre-pandemic classes on campus with only a few asynchronous online courses and is currently enrolled in a combination of synchronous and hybrid classes. The third author, in their late 20s, completed a Bachelor of Science in a field outside of social work in a fully on-campus program, then several years later enrolled as a traditional-track Master of Social Work student in an online, asynchronous program prior to COVID-19. The authors had not met prior to beginning work on this paper. Information for this case study was gathered by reviewing recent literature on the relevant topics, listening to and relating the observations and experiences of their peers, and forming a consensus by qualitatively discussing personal experiences and observations. Based on the content of these discussions and readings, we offer our observations on the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous online learning and recommendations for faculty who will teach future social work cohorts in an increasingly online environment.

## Online Learning in Social Work

### Accessibility

Delivering distance learning in a manner that humanizes each student by recognizing their individual differences and providing necessary support and services is crucial in ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in online courses. There is a common belief that the lack of face-to-face interaction in online courses would result in environments that are free of discrimination, marginalization, and othering (Moncada Linares, 2016). However, research shows that online communities are still subject to the social rules and norms of the learning environment; failure to meet these expectations can leave students feeling excluded in their online learning environment (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). To address this, educational institutions, instructors, and other students must be mindful of the disability, social, and economic factors that could impact one's experience with remote learning environments. In Competency Three of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), CSWE encourages social workers to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to fundamental human rights such as education (CSWE, 2015). Additionally, the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics states that practitioners must be mindful of the socioeconomic and cultural factors that may impact a person's access to electronic technology (NASW, 2017).

### Social Factors

Groton and Spadola (2020) interviewed social work students to understand their preferences in online learning environments better, and the results showed that interactive components, including feedback from professors and opportunities to engage with other students, were highly valued. Though there is substantial evidence on the importance of instructor-student relationships, research has shown that online learning environments tend to provide limited, infrequent, and impersonal interactions that do not promote effective working relationships (Pacansky-Brock, Smedshammer, & Vincent-Layton, 2020). Instructors are encouraged to address this challenge by focusing their approach on the social nature of learning by establishing a robust social presence, allowing students to interact, and fostering a sense of community within the learning environment (Hew, 2015; Whiteman, 2002). Utilizing the social learning theory in online education allows students to witness classmate and instructor behavior and then model their own behavior accordingly, which provides an opportunity for growth that is typically not available in more independent and isolated learning environments (Khechine, Raymond, & Augier, 2020).

However, it is essential for instructors to ensure that they are not emphasizing a singular dominant view through their social presence that could result in students with different beliefs and experiences feeling marginalized or othered, which can have adverse effects on learner participation, academic success, and comfortability with establishing an online presence (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005; Said, 1978). By its nature, social work often engages with subject matter that may be triggering or controversial to some students whose lived experiences may differ significantly from those of their peers or professors. One observation noted by the authors was the difficulty in "reading the room" during video conference classes or in online forums due to the severely reduced ability to interpret their classmates' and professors' social cues such as body language, vocal tone, and facial expressions during class discussions. This sometimes led to misinterpretations of meaning, students expressing or demonstrating discomfort in engaging in class discussions, and limitations to the nuance that is afforded in face-to-face interactions.

Another social factor that should be considered in online education is class size, as it has been found that the quality of online discussions deteriorates as the class size increases (Smith et al., 2018). Smaller classes under 20 students allow more in-depth conversations, provide students and instructors with the opportunity to get to know people in the class on a deeper level, and promote a stronger sense of connection to the instructor, classmates, and course material (Smith et al., 2018; Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020). Additionally, it has been the experience of the authors that when classes are conducted via video conference platforms, class sizes of no more than about 15 students make it more likely that most of the

students will actively participate more often, rather than have most of the class discussions dominated by a handful of the same students in each class.

As colleges and universities are seeing an increase in remote and online delivery methods for courses, they are also seeing an increase in diversity among enrolled students (Pacansky-Brock et al., 2020). The opportunity to collaborate with individuals from different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and varying abilities prepares social work students to work in our globalized and diverse society. In online Master of Social Work (MSW) programs, students often log into class from different parts of the country. This creates a unique environment in which students may interact with others about their field work experience in other states working with different populations. This also allows students to share with each other the differences and challenges in their current circumstances during COVID-19, which has had varying degrees of impact both geographically and socioeconomically.

**Disability Factors**

It is already a known challenge for institutions to provide accommodations for students with invisible or "hidden" disabilities, such as those related to mental health or developmental disabilities (Terras, 2020). However, it is even more difficult to identify and accommodate for disabilities in online learning environments when even visible disabilities tend to remain hidden from the instructor until the student decides to self-disclose. One study found that graduate students were twice as likely to be diagnosed with major depressive disorder, and 1.5 times as likely to be diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder, in 2020 as they were in 2019 (Chirikov, Soria, Horgos, & Jones-White, 2020). Furthermore, students whose major field of study is in the social and behavioral sciences, including social work, had much higher rates of screening positive for major depressive disorder (38%) and generalized anxiety disorder (43%) than students in STEM, health sciences, or business degree programs (Chirikov et al., 2020). These challenges related to students' mental health is often heightened by the increased, intense mental focus and attention contributing to "Zoom fatigue" in synchronous classes, which a student may be enrolled in for 15 hours per week or more (Sklar, 2020). Early in the pandemic, this was compounded for students by the reduction or elimination of campus-based mental health services at many colleges and universities due to campus closures and increased efforts around social distancing (Lumpkin, 2020). It should be noted that since then, most universities have implemented telehealth services that are available for students to access remotely (Warren & Smalley, 2020). However, there are unique challenges that come with accessing mental health services remotely. Finding a private space to have a discussion with a counselor while sharing a home with several people can be difficult. Also, having to access these services via personal computer may compound the stress associated with the already increased screen time.

For students who are Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), the impact of the pandemic has been even more devastating. Even before the pandemic, BIPOC students were more likely to feel overwhelmed in college than their White classmates but were much less likely to seek mental health support (Lipson, Kern, Eisenberg, & Breland-Noble, 2018). Since widespread campus closures began, BIPOC students have been more likely to report depression and anxiety than white students (Chirikov et al., 2020). As students with mental health challenges are more than twice as likely to drop out of college (Lipson, Abelson, Ceglarek, Phillips, & Eisenberg, 2019), this places BIPOC students at a much higher risk of not completing their degrees compared to their white peers.

Murphy, Malenczak, and Ghajar, (2019) found that students with psychiatric disabilities expressed more difficulty with time management, lowered ability to concentrate, and struggled with the lack of in-person contact with the instructor. However, students with a psychiatric disability reported a preference for online delivery because it allowed them a longer time to formulate responses, reduced anxiety due to being more comfortable with online interaction, and made it easier to manage mental health symptoms (Murphy et al., 2019). Students with autism spectrum disorder or other developmental and intellectual disorders were also more likely to report a preference for online classes, as in-person communications with distractions such as crowded spaces with multiple people talking can lead to anxiety and burnout (Sklar, 2020).

Terras (2020) conducted a study that compared the similarities and differences of accommodations that students with varying disability classifications received while taking online courses. The results showed that students with ADHD were most negatively impacted by their disability in online education, while students with chronic health conditions and visual impairments appeared to be the least impacted (Terras, 2020). It was found that students with visual impairments and chronic health conditions benefited from the flexible nature of online courses and stated that the use of technology actually helped accommodate their needs (Terras, 2020).

Anecdotally, when issues around accessibility in relation to disability were discussed in the authors' classes, classmates who have disabilities related to mobility stated that online learning was a far more accessible option due to not having to navigate getting around campus and buildings with varying levels of accessibility, find accessible parking, or worry about tending to their physical needs when away from their home environment. Another classmate stated that due to having a vision impairment that made it difficult to see at night, normally they would be unable to attend an evening class on campus because of not being able to drive after dark, but that online learning eliminated this barrier. However, students with hearing impairments could find it more difficult to follow lectures, classroom discussions, or assigned podcasts and videos unless closed captioning or transcripts were readily available.

**Economic Factors**

Distanced and remote learning has often been praised for its inclusive nature and ability to accommodate and provide students with varying abilities and those restricted to certain geographical locations access to higher education (Afrouz & Crisp, 2020; Smith et al., 2018). However, online learning can still exacerbate discrimination and oppression in society and expand gaps in access to resources (Harper, 2020; Moeller & Jung, 2014).

The rapid switch to online learning in 2020 highlighted several areas where students who had fewer economic resources were placed at a much greater disadvantage than if they had access to campus resources. A lack of access to reliable high-speed internet, or sharing bandwidth with housemates or family members who are also attending school or work remotely, can frequently cause video and audio to freeze or lag on the videoconferencing platform and when streaming videos. A laptop that was economically priced for students when purchased only a few years ago may not have a good-quality camera or microphone built in or may not be able to fully interact with all the features of emerging technologies like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, limiting the student's ability to fully participate in a synchronous class. Most students use a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to access their virtual classes, which means that any slides that are shared during a virtual meeting may be just a few inches across. If a student does not have the economic resources or physical space for an external monitor, this can render text-intensive slides virtually illegible when shared via videoconferencing.

Although online education provides opportunities for students that face-to-face instruction does not, it is crucial to ensure that they are conducted in a manner that empowers students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Being that poverty and race tend to commingle in the United States, Harper (2020) emphasizes the importance of universities working to address racialized digital access inequity as the transition to remote learning has disproportionately impacted low-income communities. Closing the digital access gaps for students would not only include providing the necessary technology for participation in online learning but would also include strategies and investments into improving access to courses for students living in low-income communities (Harper, 2020).

**Strengths in Online Education**

Recurring themes in the positive outcomes of success in online education experienced by the authors included communication, scheduling flexibility, cohort community development, and overall commitment from faculty. In the virtual environment of synchronous classes conducted over videoconferencing, examples of this included small group icebreaker activities between students at the beginning of each class, break out groups for discussion, group projects, weekly faculty check-ins, and consistent communication from

the faculty of assignments and virtual meetings and their corresponding links via email.

The transposition from campus-based to online learning provides an excellent opportunity for the social work profession to provide educational opportunities for students that may have faced barriers in a traditional in-person learning environment regarding work, transportation, or family commitments. Students electing to take online courses when not in a pandemic tend to choose them for the increased flexibility available with asynchronous education (Afrouz & Crisp, 2020). Course flexibility is particularly beneficial for students who have a family, work full-time, or have a disability that makes regular in-person attendance difficult. Online education gives students who would not have been able to enroll in face-to-face courses the opportunity to still participate in higher education via online learning environments. This flexibility became crucial as COVID-19 cases rose in the fall of 2020, causing many parenting students to need to provide support as their children transitioned to virtual learning while still enrolled in their own coursework.

**Challenges in Online Education**

The most common stressors related to online learning deal with the student's ability to engage with other students and the instructor, navigating technical difficulties, and lack of institutional support (Afrouz & Crisp, 2020; Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, & Althunibat, 2020; Smith et al., 2018). In previous studies, students also frequently cited that technological issues such as interruptions to WiFi access, poor audio and visual quality, and difficulty navigating the online learning platform were barriers to successful engagement and communication in online education (Afrouz & Crisp, 2020; Almaiah et al., 2020; Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman, & Cross-Denny, 2012; Won, Bailey, & Yi, 2020). The challenges that students felt in online learning environments prior to COVID-19 are very similar to the ones felt throughout the recent transition to online learning. However, these stressors were exacerbated by the fact that students and faculty who were not prepared for or did not have previous experience with online education were now having to make that adjustment midsemester.

Recurring themes in negative outcomes of success in synchronous online education among the fall 2020 cohort included reports of exhaustion, depression, isolation, disappointment, confusion, and inconsistency. Informal reports among the authors and their classmates indicate that these themes included feeling overwhelmed by a combination of coursework, concerns for the pandemic-related health and safety of their family members and themselves, grief due to the untimely deaths of loved ones to COVID-19, stress over housing insecurity and evictions related to loss of income or fluctuations in the real estate market, and feeling isolated from friends and family members—or, conversely, having a lack of privacy due to being quarantined with family or housemates. Other challenges included technological difficulties, scheduling issues among classmates, and, by the end of the semester, a sense of overall apathy from both students and faculty. In asynchronous online classes, the most common challenge experienced by the authors was sensing a lack of personal connection to their professors and classmates.

One common technological problem was having trouble hearing the audio in videos over videoconferencing platforms and not having automated closed captions available which made the information more difficult to understand when videos were lagging. In hybrid classes, some classrooms did not have the proper recording equipment installed and if so, sometimes the camera or microphone would shut off unpredictably, necessitating that the professor interrupt their lecture to turn them back on. Though these technological challenges were present prepandemic, they have been magnified and become more frequent with the increased use of hybrid classes. Some of the common technological and accessibility issues that students had pre-pandemic were also exacerbated due to the lack of preparation for and inexperience with teaching hybrid learning classes amongst faculty and universities.

## Recommendations

While professors have limited direct control over many of the technological limitations discussed previously, there are practices that can help increase the accessibility of online classes, especially in the case of synchronous classes

ducted over a videoconferencing platform. Posting lecture slides in advance allows students to review and possibly download or print them out prior to class, so that even if slides are difficult to read over a video conferencing platform, students can still follow and take notes. If a professor plans to screen a prerecorded video during class, posting links to the video so it may be viewed before class, then discussing the video during class or on discussion boards, will save time that is often lost to navigating technical problems. For larger classes, using a discussion board outside of class time may be a more effective way of encouraging students to discuss class topics, rather than having students feel rushed or overwhelmed in large-group discussions. The use of breakout rooms to facilitate small group discussions during class is also beneficial in this regard. To reduce the likelihood of videoconferencing platform fatigue, consider longer breaks of at least ten minutes interspersed throughout the class or shortening the amount of synchronous class time by including more asynchronous activities such as instructional videos and class discussion boards. In asynchronous classes, consider scheduling one-to-one or small-group meetings with students periodically throughout the semester to "check-in" and foster a sense of connection.

As online classes are conducted outside of the relatively controlled environment of a university classroom, it is important that professors be sensitive to the barriers and distractions that may be present in a student's learning environment. Pandemic-related campus closures and restrictions to public facilities, such as coffee shops and libraries that traditionally offered free internet access, mean that students are limited in their options for where they can log into class. Policies that require students to keep their cameras on as a condition of earning points for class participation disregard the realities of taking a class from within an individual's home. Mandatory camera policies are also in conflict with the Code of Ethics, which states that social work students should be evaluated fairly and respectfully (NASW, 2017). While it may be amusing to see a classmate's cat or toddler wander onto the screen, housemates and family members may be uncomfortable with incidentally being on camera while moving about their own home. Students may be uncomfortable with having their bedroom or an untidy living area visible in the background or may not have the software capability to use virtual backgrounds. In these situations, it may be better for the student to turn off their camera and use the text chat or voice functions to participate in class discussions.

With the ever-changing circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the various stressors that have come with it, professors and universities must be prepared to support students on a deeper level than was previously expected. This includes extending empathy towards and acknowledging the hardships that students may be facing at this time. In the authors' experience, professors that conducted quick "mental health check-ins" at the beginning of class fostered a sense of community within the classroom while also humanizing their students. Conducting these check-ins allows the professor to gauge where their students are emotionally and gives them some insight into the stressors students are experiencing. Being that some students may not feel comfortable discussing stressful matters in class, professors may want to make themselves available and encourage students to reach out if they have any issues that they would like to discuss outside of class. It would also be beneficial for faculty to stay updated on any changes made to university-based mental health services and help disseminate that information to students in their classes. Similarly, at the institutional level, it is important to ensure that updates, information, and changes to campus-based services are clearly communicated to faculty and students and are easy to find on the university website.

## Limitations

Though these snapshot findings are relevant to the subject matter, they are limited to the three authors' anecdotal reports. Significant limitations include small sample size and generalizability. For this case study to possess more reliability, validity, and generalizability, a larger sample size is needed as well as a more rigorous research design.

In future research, a mixed-methods study could provide more comprehensive data among BSW and MSW students and instructors. To gather a wide range of student and faculty perspec-

tives on the challenges and benefits of online learning during COVID-19, simple random sampling could be used to ensure high internal validity and reliability. Compiling a comprehensive review of both qualitative and quantitative data with a larger sample size across universities over time would increase generalizability, reliability, and validity from the current case study.

Additionally, the anecdotes provided in this case study are limited due to the racial and socioeconomic backgrounds of the authors. To provide a more culturally appropriate review from the field, it would be necessary that the authors come from a more diverse background. All three authors are White, middle class college students. Expanding this case study to student perspectives from a larger variety of cultures and worldviews across campuses would ensure a more balanced review.

## Conclusion

As online social work degree programs are becoming more common, even pre-COVID, it stands to reason that the demand for virtual learning is only going to increase moving forward. Even with the advancements in technology that make it possible to enroll in post-secondary education fully online, it is unrealistic for students or faculty to expect that the traditional campus-based classroom experience can be replicated in a virtual environment. Learning or teaching from home is a far different experience than learning or teaching in a professional academic setting, and this should be acknowledged and accommodated accordingly. Pandemic learning is also not comparable to the online degree programs that have been in place for several years—it is crisis learning under intense shared trauma. Rather than try to force a metaphorical square peg into a round hole by taking a business-as-usual approach, it may be more beneficial for students and faculty alike to rethink some of the aspects of virtual learning. This involves taking a strengths-based approach to maximizing practices that are most conducive to learning and changing or eliminating those that are less productive or detrimental. By modeling an evolutionary approach to social work education, students will be better equipped to adapt to the ever-advancing technologies and practices they will encounter as they begin careers that will extend into the middle of the 21st century.

## References


Afrouz, R. & Crisp, B. R. (2020). Online education in social work, effectiveness, benefits, and challenges: A scoping review. *Australian Social Work, 74*(1), 55-67. Retrieved from https: doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2020.1808030

Almaiah, M. A., Al-Khasawneh, A., & Althunibat, A. (2020). Exploring the critical challenges and factors influencing the E-learning system usage during COVID-19 pandemic. *Education and Information Technologies*. Advance online publication. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10219-y

Change.org. (2020). Search results for "CSWE field." Retrieved from https://bit.ly/34m4ZTA

Chirikov, I., Soria, K. M., Horgos, B., & Jones-White, D. (2020). *Undergraduate and graduate students' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.* Retrieved from SERU Consortium website: https://bit.ly/3mJq2pB

Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *2015 Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs*. [PDF report]. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2LYMZIP

Council on Social Work Education. (2020, March 25). *CSWE alters field hours required for social work students*. [Press release]. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3ns22bF

Dalton, M. H. (2018). Online programs in higher education: Strategies for developing quality courses. *FOCUS on Colleges, Universities & Schools*, *12*(1), 1-8. Retrieved from https:// bit.ly/2KjpA4q

Garrison, D. R. & Arbaugh, J. B. (2007). Researching the community of inquiry framework: Review, issues, and future directions. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *10*(3), 157-172. Retrieved from https:// doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2007.04.001

Groton, D. B. & Spadola, C. E. (2020). Variability, visuals, and interaction: Online learning recommendations from social work students. *Social Work Education*. Retrieved from https:// doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1806997

Gunawardena, C., & Zittle, F. (1997). Social presence as a predictor of satisfaction within a computer-mediated conferencing environment. The American Journal of Distance Education, 11(3), 8-26. Retrieved from https:// doi.org/10.1080/08923649709526970

Harper, S. (2020). COVID-19 and the racial equity implications of reopening college and university campuses. *American Journal of Education, 127*(1), 153-162. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1086/711095

Hodgson, V., & Reynolds, M. (2005). Consensus, difference and "multiple communities" in net worked learning. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames)*, *30*(1), 11-24. Retrieved from https:// doi.org/10.1080/0307507052000307768

Hew, F. H. (2015). Student perceptions of peer versus instructor facilitation of asynchronous online discussions: Further findings from three cases. *Instructional Science*, *43*(1), 19-38. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251 -014-9329-2

Kambhampaty, A. P. (2020, April 3). 'It is pretty bad down here at present.' What we can learn from a letter written just after the height of the 1918 flu pandemic. *Time.* Retrieved from https://bit.ly/34jrfO8

Khechine, H., Raymond, B., & Augier, M. (2020). The adoption of a social learning system: Intrinsic value in the UTAUT model. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 51* (6), 2306-2325. Retrieved from https:// doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12905

Lipson, S. K., Abelson, S., Ceglarek, P., Phillips, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2019). Investing in student mental health [PDF report]. Retrieved from American Council on Education website: https://bit.ly/3rsHjXU

Lipson, S. K., Kern, A., Eisenberg, D., & Breland -Noble, A. (2018). Mental health disparities among college students of color. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *63*(3), 348-356. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/ j.jadohealth.2018.04.014

Lumpkin, L. (2020, May 28). College students count on their schools for mental-health help, but now many can't get it. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://wapo.st/3rmOZL3

Moeller, M. & Jung, J. (2014). Sites of normalcy: Understanding online education as prosthetic

technology. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *34* (4). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v34i4.4020

Moncada Linares, S. (2016). Othering: Towards a critical cultural awareness in the language classroom. *HOW - A Columbian Journal for Teachers of English*, *23*(1), 129-146. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.19183/how.23.1.157

Murphy, A., Malenczak, D., & Ghajar, M. (2019). Identifying challenges and benefits of online education for students with a psychiatric disability. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 3* (4), 395-409. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1247112

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers.* Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3aIF7W8

Pacansky-Brock, M., Smedshammer, M., & Vincent-Layton, K. (2020). Humanizing online teaching to equitize higher education. *Current Issues in Education, 21*(2), 1-22. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33218.94402

Pardasani, M., Goldkind, L., Heyman, J. C., & Cross-Denny, B. (2012). How much does the distance in distance education matter? Our students speak. *Social Work Education*, *31*(4), 406-421. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2011.573547

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism: Western representation of the Orient*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

Sklar, J. (2020, April 24). 'Zoom fatigue' is taxing the brain. Here's why that happens. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from https://on.natgeo.com/2KDw8Le

Smith, K., Jeffery, D., & Collins, K. (2018). Slowing things down: Taming time in the neoliberal university using social work distance education. *Social Work Education*, *37*(6), 691-704. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2018.1445216

Smith, W. (2015). Relational dimensions of virtual social work education: Mentoring faculty in a web-based learning enviroment. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *43*(2), 236-245. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-014-0510-5

Sullivan, E. & Green, E. (2020, July 10). As Trump demanded schools reopen, his experts warned of 'highest risk.' *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://nyti.ms/34eWsSz

Terras, K. (2020). Comparing disability accommodations in online courses: A cross-classification. *Journal of Educators Online, 17*(2), 175-187. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/34raEYI

Warren, J. C. & Smalley, K. B. (2020, June 18). Using telehealth to meet mental health needs during the COVID-19 crisis [Web log post]. Retrieved from The Commonwealth Fund website: https://bit.ly/38dl6VN

Waters, M. (2020, April 17). How to quarantine...in 1918. *Slate*. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3oZOO6p

Whiteman, J. M. (2002). *Interpersonal communication in computer mediated learning* [White paper]. Orlando, FL: University of Central Florida. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED465997)

Won, A. S., Bailey, J. O., & Yi, S. (2020). Work-in-progress—learning about virtual worlds in virtual worlds: How remote learning in a pandemic can inform future teaching. *2020 6th International Conference of the Immersive Learning Research Network (iLRN)*, Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.23919/iLRN47897.2020.9155201