



Assessing Writing Skills of MSW Applicants: Implications for Admission Decisions

Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	<i>Assessing Writing Skills of MSW Applicants: Implications for Admission Decisions</i>
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Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol.26 No.1</i>
Manuscript ID:	<i>261029</i>
Page Number:	<i>29</i>
Year:	<i>2023</i>

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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.

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ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

Assessing Writing Skills of MSW Applicants: Implications for Admission Decisions

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Abstract

This study explores the objective assessment of applicant personal statements often used as part of master of social work (MSW) admission requirements. Eight hundred and eighteen admission applications are explored using the writing analysis tools in Microsoft® Word. The research asked, “Can personal statements be a meaningful part of the MSW admissions decision process?” Variations in advanced and regular standing, acceptance status, references, and social services experience are explored in relation to subjective scores on personal statements for admission to a MSW program. The implications of developing and using objective standards for admissions decisions is discussed.

Assessing Writing Skills of MSW Applicants: Implications for Admission Decisions

Personal statements are typically required of applicants to MSW programs (GlenMayer & Oakes, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Miller & Koerin, 1998). As part of the process of assessing suitability for the profession, the personal statement, at least potentially, can be one of the most important aspects of evaluation of MSW applicants. There is, however, little published research on personal statement assessment and little research on how suitability characteristics of applicants can be assessed through the use of objective measures (GlenMayer & Oakes, 2002). Overall, the admissions process continues to be one of the least studied components of social work education (GlenMayer & Oakes, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Miller & Koerin, 1998). The studies that examine admissions processes and outcomes are few and far between (GlenMayer & Oakes, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Miller & Koerin, 1998). Elpers and FitzGerald (2013) have suggested that there are challenges in implementing the gatekeeping process. Reynolds (2004) suggests that programs should avoid using arbitrary and capricious standards for admission and urges programs to

develop admission policies that can differentiate between suitable and unsuitable applicants.

In a previous study (GlenMayer & Oakes, 2002), one of the authors tested an objective instrument for scoring personal statements and found that the interrater reliability of the scoring instrument was not particularly high, but that individual subjectivity on scoring personal statements is reduced through the use of multiple raters. Notably, the previous study found that the area of least agreement among faculty scoring personal statements was the evaluation of writing quality.

The current study builds on the previous study by testing the use of standardized tools in Microsoft® Word to explore ways to bring an objective approach to scoring writing skills in personal statements. Jones (2013) employed a similar method using linguistic analysis in exploring personal statements and admission in other professions. Similar to the current study, Jones (2013) used spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation to focus on personal statements as part of the university admission process. As GlenMayer and Oakes (2002) noted in the previous study, if personal statements are to be a meaningful part of admissions decisions, reliable measures must be developed.

Literature Review

Gatekeeping in Admissions

Gatekeeping in admissions to MSW programs begins with a basic assessment of the suitability of prospective students for entry into the profession (GlenMayer & Bolin, 2007). Professional accreditation requires the creation of mechanisms for admissions and the development of explicit criteria for the screening of applicants. Cole (1991) states, “Social work educators have the responsibility for first-line gatekeeping for the profession. The responsibility involves screening out the ‘unsuitable’ applicant” (p. 18). Likewise, Reynolds (2004) asserts “it is imperative for programs to avoid utilizing arbitrary and

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capricious standards for admissions and to develop admission policies capable of differentiating between suitable and unsuitable applicants. . .” (p. 19). Suitability includes academic and nonacademic characteristics, and sometimes these qualities have been defined in retrospect as the characteristics of students who were successful in class and field (Miller & Koerin, 1998).

Writing Skills

The role of writing has been identified as an important measure of competence of entrants and the effectiveness of professional writing in social work (Department for Children, Schools and Families/Department of Health, 2009; Department of Education, 2011). GlenMaye and Oakes’ previous study (2002) explored interrater reliability of scoring personal statements. That study found that the correlation obtained for interrater reliability among pairs of faculty rating the writing component of the personal statement was the lowest of the five categories tested (writing, professional commitment, goals for degree, life experience, and self-awareness). In other words, faculty rating personal statements according to specific criteria agreed least often in the area of writing skills.

Criteria for Suitability and Potential for Academic Success

Suitability and potential have been assessed by varying criteria, including undergraduate grade point average (GPA), Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) score, social services experience, and references. An ability to form professional relationships, the appropriate use of power, social awareness, and commitment to social change are also seen as characteristics required of social workers (LaFrance et al., 2000).

Measures of academic performance, particularly GPA of graduate applicants, have prominence in admissions decisions. Several studies support a positive relationship between classroom performance in the MSW programs and academic performance (GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Gibbs, 1994; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Miller & Koerin, 1998; Younes, 1998). Hepler and Noble (1990) found that the GPA of applicants with a bachelor’s of social work (BSW) degree was not as highly correlated with GRE scores as applicants for regular admissions with different majors. Similarly, discrepancies between the GPA of applicants having a BSW and the GRE test for

writing prompted Hepler and Noble (1990) to advocate for higher admission standards to MSW advanced standing programs. Measures of experience in social services are common criteria in the rating of applicants for admissions, although their weights vary among programs and forms of admissions, just as programs differ in treatments of volunteer and paid positions. Use of these criteria is supported by studies that found that students with experience had less anxiety while beginning a practicum (Gelman, 2004) and had higher performance in field courses (Thomas et al., 2004). However, studies have found a weak association between previous experience and overall performance in MSW programs, and the retention and weighting of work experience as an admissions criterion may be rooted in heritage and ideology (Pelech et al., 1999). Fortune (2003) also came to the conclusion that studies of how well faculty admissions ratings predict students’ performances in school show mixed results.

Personal Statements and Analysis of Writing in Admissions

Personal statements are used in the graduate and undergraduate admissions process of many disciplines (GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Brihl & Wasieleski, 2004; Kretchmar, 2006; Powers & Fowles, 1997). Fastre et al. (2008) studied the admissions criteria that were most related to success and found that a combination of verbal skills, prior knowledge, academic adjustment, and attachment best predicted study success. In their study, verbal skills were assessed using the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) of verbal and analytical writing. Fastre et al. (2008) noted that the use of personal statements in admissions decisions was problematic because of the subjective nature of the scoring of such data and that standardized procedures to measure personal statements would make them appropriate for use in admissions evaluations. Kretchmar (2006) found that an acceptable level of interrater reliability of ratings of essays required the use of 10 or more raters. GlenMaye and Oakes’ previous study (2002) on personal statements also found that interrater reliability was low and that the use of multiple raters to assess personal statements would improve reliability. Powers and Fowles (1997) suggested that personal statements may not be a valid indicator of writing proficiency, finding that expository test essays were more highly related to indicators of writing

skill and were highly correlated with GRE verbal scores. These authors also found that a majority of their study participants admitted receiving help in drafting or revising their personal statements, but noted that independently written statements were no more valid indicators of writing skill than those in which applicants received help.

The use of personal statements has been a long-standing practice in admissions processes of many disciplines, and even though their validity has been questioned, and reliability of scoring has long been noted, they still have a place in admissions decisions (Powers & Fowles, 1997; GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002). However, if the goal of admissions is to apply a valid and reliable measure to ensure fair and effective decisions, objective standards and procedures should be developed. It is the intention of this study to explore the use of tools in Microsoft® Word to analyze writing in the personal statements of applicants to MSW programs.

Methods

Sample

This study used a purposive sample of 818 applications from the past eight admissions periods of the authors' MSW program located in a Midwestern state university. The applicants in the sample had a mean age of 30.71 ($SD = 9.25$) with 60.3% non traditional students (defined as those who were 26 years old or older, based on the institutional definition). Females were overrepresented with 87.8% of the sample, while Caucasians (78.6%) were also overrepresented. There was an even distribution of those applicants for the regular program (50.1%) and the advanced standing program (49.8%), with the majority of applicants requesting to be in the full time program (72.8%).

In terms of ethnicity, 78.6% ($n = 577$) reported being Caucasian, 11.3% ($n = 83$) African American, 2.6% ($n = 19$) Hispanic, 1.6% ($n = 12$) Native American, 2.6% ($n = 19$) Asian American, and 2.9% ($n = 22$) of students reported being of other racial backgrounds, which includes multiple, foreign, Pacific Islanders, and other.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Study Respondents (N = 818)

Age (<i>n</i> = 780)	Range = 42 (20 to 62)	<i>M</i> = 30.71 (<i>SD</i> = 9.25) <i>Mdn</i> = 27.00 Mode = 23
	Traditional (<i>n</i> = 310)	39.7%
	Non-Traditional (<i>n</i> = 470)	60.3%
Gender (<i>n</i> = 797)	Female (<i>n</i> = 700)	87.8%
	Male (<i>n</i> = 95)	11.9%
Ethnicity (<i>n</i> = 734)	Caucasian (<i>n</i> = 577)	78.6%
	African American (<i>n</i> = 83)	11.3%
	Hispanic (<i>n</i> = 19)	2.6%
	Native American (<i>n</i> = 12)	1.6%
	Asian American (<i>n</i> = 19)	2.6%
	Others (<i>n</i> = 22)	2.9%
Classification (<i>n</i> = 813)	Regular Standing (<i>n</i> = 408)	50.1%
	Advanced Standing (<i>n</i> = 405)	49.8%
Status (<i>n</i> = 794)	Full-time (<i>n</i> = 579)	72.8%
	Part-time (<i>n</i> = 215)	27.0%

Data Collection

The application for the MSW program included the completion of a data form which included information on past social services experience, three letters of reference, a personal statement, and grade point average based on the last 60 hours of completed college course work. These items are summed, with 100 points being the maximum score possible. The personal statement is worth up to twenty-five points, the social services experience is worth up to nine points, each reference is a maximum of two points, and the grade point average is multiplied by 15 to create a maximum score of 60.

The directions for the personal statement say that it is to be four to six pages long. The applicants must address their personal and professional values and/or beliefs that have led them to consider a graduate degree in social work; their special interests for a career in social work;

their experiences with people who are culturally, ethnically, or in other ways different from their own background; a personal experience which contributed to their choice of a social work career; and professional and/or social services experiences that contributed to their choice of a social work career on the master's level. These areas are evaluated and scored using five categories developed by GlenMaye and Oakes (2002): writing proficiency, social work commitment and values, goals for social work career, life experience and motivation, and self awareness and reflectiveness. These categories "appeared to measure qualities necessary for a social worker" (p. 70). Each of these five categories is scored zero to five, with specific anchor points for each category. A score of a three in any category is considered to be the expected graduate level for a student's application. Thus, a score of 15 on the personal statement is considered average graduate level. All

identifying information is removed from the statements, two raters score each personal statement, and these are averaged for use in the scoring of applicants. The process of scoring the statements is separate from the scoring of other parts of the application, and raters are not aware of the applicant's GPA or other demographic or academic factors.

Procedures

Once the authors received approval for research on human subjects from the university's institutional review board (IRB), the examination of personal statements was commenced. Personal statements submitted to the School of Social Work for admission into the master of social work program were scanned and converted to Microsoft® Word documents for content analysis. The sample of complete admission packets ($N = 818$) included personal statements along with the applicant's self reported social services work and volunteer experience, references, grade point averages, and the total score on the application based on combining the ratings of scorers in all these components of the application.

Once converted to Word-processed documents, personal statements were analyzed using the proofing tools options in Microsoft® Word. These tools include level of readability, grade level of text, number of grammar errors, number of passive sentences used, and the number of characters per word and total words used. In particular, the analysis makes use of two tools: the Flesch Reading Ease tool and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tool. The reading ease analysis was developed in the 1940s by Rudolf Flesch. The formula created by Flesch uses the average sentence length in words and the average word length in syllables to calculate reading ease. These two numbers when placed in a formula create a score between 0 and 100. A passage that scores 0 on the Flesch scale is extremely difficult to read, while scores of 100 are extremely easy to read. Scores of 60 to 70 would be easily understood by 11–13 year old students, and scores of 30 or less would be best understood by college graduates.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tool makes use of the Flesch Reading Ease score to calculate a reading level based on grades in school. Simply stated, a score of 10 would be tenth grade level, while scores of higher than 12 would be college level writing levels. For example, Time magazine

scores about 52 on the Flesch Reading Ease tool, the written assignment of a sixth grade student has a score of 60–70 (and a reading grade level of 6–7), and the Harvard Law Review has a general readability score in the low 30s (World Heritage Encyclopedia, n.d.). Because of the weighting scale used, long words affect reading ease more than grade level. In addition to reading ease and grade level, Microsoft® Word tools were also used to calculate the number of passive sentences and the number of words used in the personal statement.

Study Design

A content analysis of personal statements was implemented using the Microsoft® Word (2010) tools for evaluating writing. Each applicant was scored using a previously developed rubric for rating qualifications in areas relevant to the admission decision. The scores included an overall total point score and item scores in social services experience, references, and grade point average (GPA).

Data analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS®) was used for data analysis. Univariate and bivariate statistical tests were used to describe and analyze the data. Simple descriptive statistics were used to understand how characteristics of students who applied to the program related to their personal statements. *T*-tests were used along with Pearson correlations to determine the relationship between the subjective assessment of the personal statements and objective assessment of writing skills using Microsoft® Word document reviewing tools.

Findings

Univariate Analysis

Several additional descriptive statistics provide an overview of the applicants to the master of social work program. The overall average Grade Point Average (GPA) of the applicants was a mean of 3.39 ($SD = 0.396$), and a median of 3.42. The mean GPA of accepted applicants was 3.50 ($SD = .31$), while the mean GPA for denied applicants 3.06 ($SD = .41$). The mean score on the references (out of a possible six) was 5.09 ($SD = 1.14$) for the accepted applicants and 4.23 ($SD = 1.81$) for the denied applicant. This indicates that denied applicants had far wider variations in their reference scores than those accepted.

Univariate statistics focused on personal narratives' subjective and objective scores reveal slight differences between the accepted and denied MSW applicants. The mean of the subjective reviews of the personal narratives indicate that for those accepted into the MSW program was 17.78 ($SD = 2.82$) with those denied having a mean of 15.85 ($SD = 3.13$). The objective tool Microsoft® Word document reviewing tools revealed fewer variations. The Flesch Reading Ease score of accepted applicants was $M = 56.19$ ($SD = 9.68$), while the mean for denied applicants was 58.74 ($SD = 10.38$). The average Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of accepted applicants was 10.47 ($SD = 1.89$) whereas denied applicants' average was 10.18 ($SD = 2.70$).

Bivariate Analysis

Pearson's correlation. Pearson's correlation coefficients revealed several significant relationships between variables used in the scoring of applicants for admission into the master of social work program. First, the age of the applicant, $M = 30.7$ ($SD = 9.25$), was positively correlated with both the Social Services Experience, $r = .26$, ($p \leq .01$) and the Overall Score, $r = .09$, ($p \leq .05$).

Next, the Personal Statement Score (25 possible), $M = 17.23$ (range 7–24), was positively related to the applicant's references ($r = .19$, $p \leq .01$), Social Services Experience ($r = .14$, $p \leq .05$), and Reading Ease Score ($r = -.14$, $p \leq .01$). Then, the applicant's Grade Point Average (GPA) was negatively correlated with Flesch Reading Ease Score ($r = -.14$, $p \leq .05$) and positively correlated with Flesch Grade Level ($r = .13$, $p \leq .01$). As GPA increases, writing becomes more complex and at a higher grade level. Finally, the Overall Application Score was negatively correlated with the Flesch Reading Ease Score ($r = -.15$, $p \leq .01$). Thus, an applicant with lower reading ease scores was more likely to be admitted.

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	Age of Applicant	Average Personal Statement	Reference Score	Overall Work Exp.	GPA	% Passive Sentences	Number of Words	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch Grade	Overall Score
Age of Applicant	1.00									
Average Personal Statement	.063	1.00								
Reference Score	.028	.189**	1.00							
Overall Work Exp.	.263**	.14*	.261**	1.00						
(GPA)	-.034	.226**	.12*	-.051	1.00					
% Passive Sentences	.035	.113**	.04	.016	.024	1.00				
Number of Words	-.003	.177**	.06	.027	-.036	-.025	1.00			
Flesch Reading Ease	-.013	-.137**	-.041	.007	-.143*	-.181**	.12**	1.00		
Flesch Grade Level	-.044	.062	-.026	-.068	.125**	.238**	-.087*	-.879**	1.00	
Overall Score	.088*	.591**	.384**	.297**	.799**	.071	.048	-.151**	.095*	1.00

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

t-tests. The t-tests on the characteristics of applicants found several interesting differences between those accepted and those denied admission, categorized by admission to advanced standing and regular program. First, a significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in average Personal Statement Scores between students accepted into the advanced standing program ($M = 18.1$, $SD = 2.8$) and those denied ($M = 15.9$, $SD = 3.0$) was found.

Next, a significant difference ($p \leq .05$) in average Personal Statement Scores between students accepted into the regular program ($M = 17.5$, $SD = 2.8$) and those denied ($M = 15.7$, $SD = 3.3$) was found. Additionally, there was a significant difference ($p \leq .01$) in Overall Score (100 possible) between accepted advanced standing ($M = 80.0$, $SD = 6.0$) and accepted regular standing students ($M = 77.0$, $SD = 7.7$). And a significant difference

Table 3.

t-test Accepted/Denied, Advanced Standing/Regular Standing on Areas of Admission Scoring

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<u>Average Personal Statement (0-100)</u>						
Accepted (df 504):	Advanced Standing	18.09	2.80	.004	2.51	*
	Regular Standing	17.46	2.82			
Denied (df 219):	Advanced Standing	15.92	3.04	.218	.433	
	Regular Standing	15.73	3.26			
<u>Reference Overall Scores (0-6)</u>						
Accepted (df 504):	Advanced Standing	5.18	.960	4.33	1.73	
	Regular Standing	5.00	1.29			
Denied (df 225):	Advanced Standing	4.32	1.78	.209	.853	
	Regular Standing	4.12	1.85			
<u>Grade Point Average (0-4.0)</u>						
Accepted (df 504):	Advanced Standing	3.56	.292	5.37	3.91	**
	Regular Standing	3.49	.324			
Denied (df 209):	Advanced Standing	3.16	.359	1.46	4.04	**
	Regular Standing	2.94	.429			
<u>Flesch Reading Ease Score (0-100)</u>						
Accepted (df 491):	Advanced Standing	57.30	9.59	.889	2.56	*
	Regular Standing	55.08	9.67			
Denied (df 216):	Advanced Standing	59.26	9.06	5.89	.928	
	Regular Standing	57.95	11.79			
<u>Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score</u>						
Accepted (df 491):	Advanced Standing	10.28	1.84	1.37	-2.28	*
	Regular Standing	10.66	1.92			
Denied (df 216):	Advanced Standing	9.97	1.93	3.70	-1.31	
	Regular Standing	10.45	3.43			
<u>Score on Admissions (0-100)</u>						
Accepted (df 503):	Advanced Standing	79.96	5.97	5.18	4.92	**
	Regular Standing	76.95	7.66			
Denied (df 205):	Advanced Standing	70.94	7.46	3.25	5.37	**
	Regular Standing	64.49	9.76			

*t-test is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) equal variances assumed.

**t-test is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) equal variances assumed.

($p \leq .05$) between advanced standing ($M = 57.3$, $SD = 9.6$) and regular standing students ($M = 55.1$, $SD = 9.7$) in Flesch Reading Ease Score (regular program scores were lower) was found. A significant difference ($p \leq .05$) between accepted regular program students ($M = 10.7$, $SD = 1.9$) and advanced standing students ($M = 10.1$, $SD = 1.8$) on Flesch Grade Level Score (advanced standing was lower) was also observed. Finally, a significant difference ($p \leq .01$) in Grade Point Average (GPA) was identified between accepted students and those students denied.

Discussion

This study explored the use of tools in Microsoft® Word to assess writing proficiency in personal statements. The findings indicate that these tools may have some usefulness in evaluating personal statements by providing an analysis that is consistent. The tools found interesting differences between students that warrant further study. In particular, regular standing students have a higher grade level of writing and a lower reading ease score than advanced standing students. Some previous studies on advanced standing have questioned the preparation of BSW graduates and the awarding of advanced standing to these students. The findings of this study might be seen as supporting these concerns, but it must be noted that the differences, though statistically significant, are not of a magnitude to suggest major differences in writing proficiency. At the least, however, these findings suggest that objective measures might actually be useful in providing a more nuanced approach to evaluating writing, and in some cases may present a countervailing view to biased or stereotyped views on preparation and potential of diverse applicants.

This study also found that male applicants had a higher grade level of writing and lower reading ease score than female applicants. Again, the number of male students is small (but is representative of typical male/female ratios in social work), but these findings may again challenge preexisting views on writing proficiency and gender.

Additionally, researchers found a negative correlation between overall application score and the Flesch Reading Ease Score. In other words, applicants with higher GPAs had lower reading ease scores, indicating that they were using more complex sentences with more difficult vocabulary. This finding suggests that the Flesch scales

reflect what one would expect: Higher level writing skills are related to academic success. These findings offer some support for the use of objective assessments of writing skills to predict success.

Significant differences in the mean scores between the accepted and denied groups on grade level of writing, reading ease, GPA, and average personal statement scores (by faculty raters) were found. This finding provides some fairly strong support for the use of multiple rating systems in evaluating personal statements, and suggests that rather than employing many raters, programs may wish to use the Microsoft® Word tools in combination with a more subjective rating system (faculty raters).

The average score for reading ease and grade level indicated that applicants to the program have writing proficiency at the 10th grade level (10.42) and reading ease is at a very readable level of 56.70. This finding may be viewed in more than one way. The level of writing may be a concern to many who expect graduate school applicants to have a much higher level of writing. On the other hand, the personal statement may represent a form of writing that is qualitatively different from the academic writing expected of students. The personal statement asks students to reveal information about their ethics and values, personal and professional experiences, and experience with diversity. When a student writes about personal experiences, their writing is softened to tell their story. Further research looking at the relationship between the writing level of personal statements versus the writing level of academic essays would be helpful in determining the relationship between these very different styles of writing.

The number of words in the personal statement was positively related to the score (by raters) on the statement. Social services experience and GPA were also positively related to the personal statement score. There was no significant correlation between social service experience and GPA, however. Applicants tended to write better statements (in terms of raters' scores) if they had higher GPAs, combined with experience, and the willingness to write a longer statement.

Lastly, the use of passive sentences was not significantly correlated with most variables. As work experience increased, the use of passive sentences also increased. One can speculate about the reason for this, but it may actually reflect a

limitation of the instrument, as applicants are limited to no more than 9 points for experience, regardless of the actual years worked.

Implications

These findings offer some support for the use of objective assessments of writing skills to predict admissions success. Further research should explore the relationship between reading ease and grade level scores and outcomes of MSW students, including success on licensing exams and career advancement. The findings also suggest that these tools and others should be explored and tested for their application to increase student skills and success at the undergraduate level. Further research could examine the differences between social work and other professional programs in writing level and also could explore using a pre/post test that examines writing level changes over the course of the degree. It would also be interesting to explore faculty ratings and the qualities of personal statements that most influence faculty ratings.

This study, though limited in many ways, contributes to the quest for fair and reliable methods of choosing suitable and successful candidates for graduate programs in social work. The decision to admit or deny is not only important for the profession, but holds life-changing consequences for those who wish to pursue a career in social work. Although admission decisions are inherently subjective, objective tools like those used in this study can help to clarify factors that influence admissions decisions. Any use of objective scoring systems should always include a reflective and critical examination of inherent bias and commitment to social justice and fairness.

Conclusions

Personal statements and Grade Point Average (GPA) are both widely used and given high importance in admission decisions. This study's findings indicate that GPA and grade level of writing are positively correlated to admission to an MSW program. Further, t-tests found significant differences in the mean scores between the accepted groups (advanced standing vs. regular program) on grade level of writing, reading ease, GPA, and personal statement scores. On average, advanced standing students (those coming in with a BSW degree) had lower writing skills, as measured by the Microsoft® Word

document reviewing tools. While the Flesch Grade Level Scores for regular program and advanced standing applicants on average were within the tenth grade level, this tool potentially measures up to a grade level of 14. Average scores at the tenth grade level should not be viewed as indicating writing deficiencies. Writing at the tenth grade level is considered to be acceptable and appropriate for professional and graduate level work. The findings suggest that these tools and others should be explored and tested.

The time-intensive demands of scanning and converting personal statements to Microsoft® Word documents suggest that future research should proceed using e-documents. Programs are moving toward online admissions, so this suggestion will no doubt be a common part of admissions procedures in the near future.

Much to our relief, the findings show that admissions decisions are not significantly correlated with demographic characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Overall, the various factors used in the 100-point scoring instrument seem to produce results that discriminate among applicants, but do not disadvantage any particular population. The scoring system does seem to be an effective way to sort out relevant differences in applications.

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