

Book Review

Kurzman, P. A., & R. Paul Maiden (Eds.). (2014). *Distance learning and online education in social work*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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This is a collection of articles that were previously published in the November 2013 issue of the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. The journal's publisher, the Taylor Francis Group, has turned it into a hard cover book and published it through Routledge, also part of the Taylor Francis Group. The journal issue costs \$184 and the book is slightly less costly at \$150 (based on their listed price at the time of this writing).

Paul Kurzman and R. Paul Maiden are the editors of the book. Kurzman, a professor at Hunter College and The City University of New York, is also the editor-in-chief at the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*. He teaches policy and practice at the MSW and PhD levels. He has a wealth of experience through his many professional appointments, his authorship or editorship of eight books, and his membership on the New York State Licensing Board. He received a Lifetime Achievement Award from NASW. There was no mention in his bio, however, of experience that was specifically related to distance learning.

Maiden, professor and Executive Vice-Dean of Academic and Student Affairs at the University of Southern California (USC) School of Social Work is also extensively published, specifically in the areas of employee assistance programs, substance abuse, domestic violence at the work site, managed behavioral health care, trauma management, and evaluation of work-based human services. He is an editor of nine books. He played a key role in developing the Virtual Academic Center, which

was the first web-based MSW program to serve a national and international population.

The editors have organized the expertise of many authors into four sections: Organizational and Administrative Perspectives, Teaching and Simulating Practice, Teaching and Conducting Research, and Creating Intimacy and Interaction. The theme of the book is that distance education is an effective method of delivering social work education and that it provides a different route to the same destination as face-to-face courses: EPAS core competencies. Kurzman writes, "Unless research can uncover a statistically significant difference in student satisfaction, licensing exam pass rates, or post-graduation career achievement, we have no basis to assert that one way of pursuing the BSW or MSW degree is definitely better than another" (p. 5).

In the section titled Organizational and Administrative Perspectives, the development of USC's Virtual Academic Center, an online MSW program that was launched in 2010. The authors discuss the process the school went through and the challenges they overcame. In the next chapter, authors at the University of Hawaii did a cost analysis of their MSW program, which found that their online MSW program was 3.2 times more expensive than their on-campus program. In the next two chapters, the issues of gatekeeping, academic honest, program rigor, privacy, and digital surveillance are discussed. Following this is an article about the legal issues that should be considered in recording the presentation of guest

speakers in a virtual classroom. In the concluding chapter, the issues of class size, faculty supports, and good teaching practices are reviewed.

In the next section, *Teaching and Simulating Practice*, Levin, Whitsett, & Wood address blended formats, synchronous and asynchronous components, and the principles of adult learning. They write about building relationships with students and engaging them in the course. They include an interesting Appendix of the online course expectations for classroom decorum. For example, this Appendix gives specific guidance to students about things such as the importance of using a salutation when sending emails to professors, not typing in all capital letters, and using emoticons to indicate tone in asynchronous forums. The next article discusses teaching direct practice skills by using simulated home visits in a Second Life virtual setting. The article that follows uses case examples to illustrate how learning communities were developed through hybrid formats (partial online and partial face-to-face) and a collaborative process. Forgey, Loughran, and Hansen discuss their use of international video conferencing to deliver course content for a social work practice class to students in both the U.S. and Ireland. They provide excerpts of students' comments about their newly expanded view of social work and their appreciation of the synchronous format.

In the third section, *Teaching and Conducting Research*, Buchanan and Mathews compare on-campus students to students in hybrid classes with regard to their attitude about social work research. Their study supports a growing body of literature that finds "no statistically significant difference in outcomes, meaning that distance education is an effective alternative format for social work education" (p. 156). Buquoi and her colleagues examined technology use by BSW educators. With the need to operationally define technology, they included everything from instructors' school email to virtual worlds. They concluded that BSW educators aren't using technology at even a

moderate level and a significant barrier was having the time to develop lessons that use technology. In the following chapter, in building an online MSW program, a Texas university provided a faculty person with a course release over two semesters to develop several courses. This article discusses how they built a successful, engaging, and interactive curriculum through games, chat rooms, cyber lounges, videos of experts performing professional tasks, video journaling, synchronous discussion, and virtual learning experiences. In the following chapter, McAllister found that students particularly valued opportunities to receive immediate and spontaneous feedback.

In the final section, *Creating Intimacy and Interaction*, Aguirre and Duncan give an ethnographic account of their experience finding ways to accommodate a student who has a visual impairment. They advocated for the use of universal design principles, as well as a collaborative approach with students who have disabilities. The chapter that follows discusses the authors' experience with virtual role-plays using Second Life to teach case management skills. They suggest best practices in using virtual worlds. In the next chapter, Csiernik and McGaghan discuss how they developed a specialized program to meet competency needs for social workers in Canada. Canada is a large geographical area and physical distance is often a barrier for training, so using technology provided much needed access to specialized knowledge about addictions. The use of online video tutorials to teach library research skills is discussed in the next chapter. The last chapter describes a collaborative project between three campuses called the Pathway Program, and consequently, how they came to reconceptualize the delivery of social work education.

One of the pitfalls of any book about distance education is that our collective knowledge about technologies and their uses, as well as the development of new technologies, advances rapidly every day. This book plays an important role in sharing empirical research about the use of distance

learning in social work; however, it also risks becoming obsolete in a short amount of time. It offers a breadth of empirical research in many areas of online education. I would have liked to have seen studies about the use of social media in social work education, especially related to macro social work.

I would urge social work educators to read this book. First, it takes the pulse of how we are

currently using online education in social work, but it also offers a springboard for other programs to build upon. One thing that is clear is that online education not only offers flexibility to students, but also to social work programs. The social work programs discussed in this book have each used online learning in a distinctly different way, and I think both BSW and MSW programs will find something in it that resonates with them and inspires them to adopt strategies for their own programs.