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A Comparative Analysis of Social Work Faculty's Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures and

Practices within Online and Traditional MSW Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT

The social work profession evolved from neighborly, volunteer-based efforts into a distinct profession. Throughout the evolvement of the profession, there has been a consistent focus on meeting the needs of the poor, oppressed, and impoverished individuals in a manner that demonstrates competency on behalf of the caregiver or practitioner. Present day social work termed the process of determining, assessing, and measuring the suitability of aspiring social workers as gatekeeping. This embedded mixed-methods and correlational research design study sought to compare MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and the experiences with gatekeeping practices in both traditional learning environments and hybrid/online environments. The researcher also sought to determine if there was a relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and the practice of gatekeeping procedures with MSW faculty in both online and traditional programs. Findings concluded that there is not a significant difference between MSW faculty in traditional learning environments and MSW faculty in hybrid/online learning environments in terms of procedures and practices. In addition, findings concluded that there was a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and the perception of gatekeeping practices in traditional learning environments. There was not a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and the perception of gatekeeping practices in hybrid/online learning environments.

Keywords: gatekeeping, online learning, hybrid, traditional programming, online, social work education, faculty perception, quantitative, correlation design, program effectiveness, MSW.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The social work profession evolved from neighborly, volunteer-based efforts into a distinct profession (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Gitterman, 2014; Moore & Urwin, 1991). Throughout the evolvement of the profession, there has been a consistent focus on meeting the needs of the poor, oppressed, and impoverished individuals in a manner that demonstrates competency on behalf of the caregiver or practitioner (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Gitterman, 2014; Moore & Urwin, 1991). In present day social work, the term used for the process of determining, assessing, and measuring the suitability of aspiring social workers is gatekeeping (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Gatekeeping practices within traditional social work education (defined as face-to-face [f2f]) in the class sessions have remained an essential and vital aspect of the profession (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). The aim of gatekeeping is to reduce the risk of harm to future clients due to unfit professionals providing unethical therapeutic services (Sowbel, 2012). Despite its importance to the profession, gatekeeping practices vary greatly to include concerns about when and how students should be screened, responsibility among program faculty, and differing views among faculty as to how, when, and if gatekeeping should be implemented (Hutchens, Block, & Young, 2013; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Distance social work education, also referred to as online only or hybrid (partially online and partially in the classroom) adds to the complexity of gatekeeping in the field of social work. Over the years, online social work education has expanded from traditional, full-time course

offerings, to selective course work offered off-site, to blended classes presented as partially face-to-face [f2f] and partially web-based, to Master of Social Work (MSW) advanced standing programs fully delivered via web-based instruction (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Since the first MSW web-based program began in 2002 (Wilke & Vinton, 2006), few studies have comparatively explored gatekeeping practices and procedures between traditional MSW programs and hybrid/online MSW programs.

Background of the Study

In the field of social work, students demonstrate competency through class instruction, discussions, role play, peer-to-peer sharing, supervision, field practice, as well as ongoing individualized feedback and support (Reeves & Reeves, 2008). Students are expected to demonstrate competence at a level sufficient to enter the profession before being awarded a Master's degree (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). Collectively, department chairs and other faculty bear the burden of assuring that students meet accredited program expectations upon graduation as outlined by the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards' (EPA) nine core competencies, regardless of the learning environment, traditional or hybrid/online.

Reeves and Reeves (2008) conducted a study on online learning design, results of which suggested that online instructors must seek to provide instruction that "involves shaping desirable behaviors through the arrangement of stimuli, responses, feedback and reinforcement" (p. 49). Reeves and Reeves concluded that the development, assessment, and constant improvement of social work online education are necessary to meet student needs. Online programs provide necessary instruction to include the opportunity for responses and feedback

through reflective discussions (Bye, Smith, & Monghan-Rallis, 2009; Maidment, 2005; Reeves & Reeves, 2008); however, few studies have directly examined the concept of human reinforcement or human interaction offered through fully web-based/online or hybrid education programming. Freddolino and Sutherland (2000) conducted a study comparing online and traditional learning and settled on the fact that online learning will remain a constant presence for social work education; however, "What is the right mix of human and technological supports required to create comparable quality learning environments for undergraduate and graduate social work education" (p. 127) remains a question to be answered.

There are many benefits to online education programming for social work. Online education, specific to social work, greatly expands the opportunity for prospective students to obtain a college education and ultimately satisfy the social deficit of providing competent social work services in rustic areas that are not available to attend traditionally (Coe & Elliott, 1999). Online classes offer flexibility with regard to time, as traditional programs are generally associated with time constraints that often conflict with work schedules and family obligations. In considering the time constraints mandated by traditional MSW programs such as geographical location, inflexible class schedules, and general life obligations, online learning serves as a solution that allows students to enroll in programs they otherwise would have been unable to attend (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Reeves & Reeves, 2008; Wilke & Vinton, 2006).

When students live within close proximity to the college or university, they have the opportunity to meet with faculty as necessary. Contrarily, in more bucolic regions, where the option to physically access the instructor is not an option, the negative aspect of no human interaction exists (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Considering the recent influx of online MSW social

work education programs over the last decade (Wilke & Vinton, 2006), the likelihood of a student having limited access to faculty is high (Maidment, 2005). The predisposition of inaccessibility not only limits support to the student, but also creates implications for purposeful gatekeeping practices. Another criticism of online learning is that required discussion responses are more time consuming than dialogues held in traditional environments (Wilke & Vinton, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices in fully accredited, hybrid/online and traditional Master's level social work programs. In this study, the researcher also aimed to examine the relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping procedures in online and traditional social work education. Ultimately, the researcher sought to increase the awareness of current gatekeeping practices in social work education and contribute to the body of research concerning gatekeeping. This research usage extends beyond the profession of social work and, therefore, may be adaptable to other higher learning programs for helping professions including nursing, education, and counseling.

Research Questions and Null Hypothesis

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

   Null Hypothesis: There is no difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures.

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

Null Hypothesis: There is no difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices.

3. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment.

4. What is the relationship between hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with practice in the hybrid/online teaching environment.

Significance of the Problem

College and universities that offer traditional social work education programs are experiencing a decline in enrollment due to the perceived benefits associated with online programs. To remain competitive with online programs, traditional programs are now offering fully web-based and hybrid programs online. Unlike the motivation to evolve with instructional advancements in social work academia, the researcher is unaware of any specific gatekeeping procedures and practices that exist to assure program effectiveness in the hybrid/online educational environment.

The responsibility of social work educators and like professions to systematically assess and evaluate student fit for the profession is and has always been of great significance to service providing professions (Sowbel, 2012). This is primarily because of the nature of social work and like service professions. Social workers are service providers to vulnerable and at-risk populations for a variety of reasons, all of which uphold the position that educational institutions must assure that ethical gatekeeping practices, to include appropriate assessment, monitoring, and necessary interventions such as remediation, be implemented within the educational environment prior to awarding graduate degrees (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). With the collegiate advancement of offering fully MSW accredited programs online, universities and accrediting agencies hold a responsibility to assure that gatekeeping procedures remain ethical and fitting for the new classroom environment, hybrid/online settings. Current literature has suggested that this implicit or explicit duty can be achieved by assuring that qualified faculty hold and competently fulfil these roles, regardless of the instructional setting, traditional or online (Currer & Atherton, 2008).

The MSW level was assessed in this study because the MSW degree is viewed as the terminal degree in the social work profession. Hence, this stage of academia is both crucial and final at ensuring that graduates are ethically and competently fit for the profession. The researcher also aimed to add to the dearth of existing literature, with hopes of enhancing gatekeeping practices in online social work education. Furthermore, the researcher proposed that the findings emerging from this study will contribute to the body of research concerned with gatekeeping. This extends beyond the profession of social work to include a non-exhaustive list of helping professions such as nursing, education, and counseling.

Research Design

The researcher conducted this study remotely from a small, private university by way of email submission. Participants were located in various states within the United States of America. Participants were initially selected via the Council of Social Work Education, a public directory of 233 accredited, Masters level social work programs (Accreditation, 2015). Due to a low number of participants representing online/hybrid environments, participation was solicited from members of the Bachelor of Social Work Directors, Inc. (BPD) listserv and the Distance Education of Social Work listserv. Participants were employed as either part-time adjunct, full-time faculty, tenured track, or tenured faculty. Job titles varied between social work faculty, MSW department chair, program director, or field education director or coordinator. All the respondents were included in the sample.

To better understand the difference between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices, in traditional and online/hybrid social work programming, this study utilized an embedded mixed-methods and correlation research design (Creswell, 2012). The survey instrument collected qualitative and quantitative data simultaneiously. Qualitative data were helpful and necessary to expound on the quantitative data responses. The embedded mixed-methods and correlation research design used in this study was non-experimental.

The researcher, with permission from the author, adopted and modified Tam's (2004) gatekeeping survey to develop a mixed methods survey instrument for this study. Quantitative questions consisted of a 5-point Likert Scale survey and qualitative questions were responded to in short answer. The survey encompassed concepts of all four research questions. The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey is comprised of four sections, which included

Demographics, Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures, Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices, and Perceptions and Practices of Gatekeeping. Statements in all four sections targeted responses that were useful to examine the differences between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices between online and traditional programs. These statements were also helpful to assess the relationship between MSW faculty perception and their practice of gatekeeping.

Definition of Important Terms

The following terms are considered important and imperative that readers unvaryingly understand their definitions, as it relates to this study. In addition, this list of important definitional terms is intended to offer ease of understanding to readers who may not be familiar with common language of the social work profession. Many of the terms will be supported by citations (e.g. indicative that the terms have been used in other existing, peer reviewed literature and/or books) while other terms will be defined by the writer of the study, termed operationally defined.

BSW. Bachelors of Social Work degree

Commission of Accreditation (COA). The COA **is** the agency responsible for establishing expected behaviors as well as to evaluate and confer accreditation standards and status to qualified social work programs (Council on Social Work Education, 2015; Holloway, 2013).

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The CSWE is the agency responsible for granting accreditation status to undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the U.S.A. (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). In addition, "CSWE delegates autonomous authority

and responsibility for all accreditation activities to the COA. This authority extends to judgments regarding the accredited status of educational programs and includes the formulation and implementation of accreditation standards and procedures" (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012, p. 5).

Distance Education. According to Coe and Elliott (1999), distance education can be defined as follows:

> Distance education describes those formal teacher-learner arrangements in which the teacher and learner are geographically separated most or all of the time, and the communication between them is through a technology medium such as a satellite, computer, compressed video, or fiber optics (p. 353).

Faculty perception (operational definition). The opinion of faculty, based on instruction experience in online and/or traditional social work education environments, towards gatekeeping at their university.

Gatekeeping. A process followed by counseling, social work, and like professions in which the professional monitors and frequently evaluates a student's level of "knowledge, skills, and values" (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010, p. 407). Through gatekeeping, the professional seeks to determine if students/applicants are adequate candidates for an educational program and/or the profession (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gatekeeping may happen during the application process-prior to admission and after being admitted (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). If an intervention or other student support is necessary, a remediation plan may be implemented as a part of the gatekeeping process (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Operationally defined, gatekeeping is the method by which social work faculty fulfill their

professional responsibility to ethically examine student suitability both at the onset of the MSW program as well as throughout the program.

Gatekeeping practices (operationally defined). Gatekeeping actions currently or previously implemented by participants.

Gatekeeping procedures (operationally defined). Gatekeeping actions implemented when a student's actions are deemed inappropriate and/or unacceptable. Examples of gatekeeping procedures include requirements to retake a course, specific research assignments to address the area of deficit, or removal from a program (Hutchens et al., 2013).

Human and technological supports. The adequate amount of support necessary to provide students with a quality education in either online or face to face settings (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000)**.**

MSW (operationally defined). Masters of Social Work degree

Online Education. Often used interchangeably with distance education (e.g. previously defined earlier in this section), online education is academic instruction delivered via the World Wide Web (Ayala, 2009). Operationally defined, online education represents degree seeking social work education offered via the internet to degree seeking persons at either the undergraduate (Bachelors of Social Work) or graduate (Masters of Social Work) levels (Ayala, 2009).

Primary responsibility (**operationally defined).** In this study, primary responsibility is operationally defined as the specific entity (i.e. university admissions) and/or specific role (field director, instructors, department chairs) who may hold the responsibility of gatekeeping implementation.

Program effectiveness. From the literature, program effectiveness is defined as:

…the activity of investigating the extent to which an educational effort has succeeded in building the practice competencies that it set out for its graduates to attain. The activity shifts the emphasis from a focus on what goes into the education to a focus on what comes out – the results of the educational process. That is, as a consequence of the educational experience, do the graduates demonstrate the requisite educational outcomes as specified by the Educational Policy and curriculum design? (Holloway, 2013, p. 2)

Responsibility of gatekeeping (**operationally defined).** In this study, responsibility of gatekeeping is operationally defined as the entity (i.e. university admissions) and/or role (field director, instructors, department chairs), independently or collectively who may hold the responsibility of gatekeeping implementation.

Screen-out. The process in which applying students are disallowed admittance into a social work program (Sowbel, 2012). In addition, during this process, admitted students' active status is revoked due to failing to meet expectations of the program (Sowbel, 2012).

Student academic career (operationally defined). Student academic career is operationally defined as the time frame in which students are actively enrolled in online or traditional graduate and/or undergraduate social work programs.

Student suitability (operationally defined). The term is used interchangeably with the term *fittingness* for the social work profession. The term is defined as the ability of students to meet the expectations of the profession as outlined by the Commission of Accreditation.

Traditional social work education (operationally defined). Traditional social work education is operationally defined in terms of occurring within the classroom setting, with face to

face (f2f) interaction between students and the instructor as a sole means of participating in a given course.

Unfit professionals. Unfit professionals are defined as students whose behavior is deemed to be emotionally or physically injurious to fellow students or clients (e.g., during one's internship) (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012). The behaviors of such individuals are inexcusable and present a significant risk factor for themselves and others (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012). A direct violation of established boundaries or rules substantiates unfit professionalism as well (Currer & Atherton, 2008).

Summary

In the social work profession, gatekeeping practices are essential, especially at the graduate level (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). In the chapter, having reviewed the professional knowledge base, the researcher reviewed the evolvement of the social work profession from sole traditional classroom environments to online/hybrid and fully online class settings. The researcher then introduced the concept of gatekeeping, establishing awareness to the necessity that gatekeeping practices and procedures be implemented regardless of a MSW program setting: traditional or hybrid/online. Given the scarce presence of existing literature to explore the difference of MSW faculty perceptions and practices of gatekeeping in traditional and online environments, the researcher conducted an embedded mixed-methods and correlationa; research design to fill this gap.

Chapter 2

The Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to compare MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in traditional learning environments with MSW faculty who provide instruction in hybrid/online environments. The researcher also sought to determine if there was a relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and their practice of gatekeeping procedures with MSW faculty in both online and traditional programs. In this study, gatekeeping was operationally defined as the method by which social work faculty fulfill their professional responsibility to ethically examine student suitability during pre-admission into a MSW program, as well as ongoing until graduation (Miller & Koerin, 2001).

The benefits of gatekeeping extend beyond the educational setting. According to Moore and Jenkins (2000), gatekeeping is a method of guarding the social work profession, with the ultimate intention of producing competent graduates (Grady, 2009; Moore & Urwin, 1991). Gatekeeping also serves as a safeguard to public safety (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000). Upon graduation, graduates are presumed to be "credentialed and sanctioned to practice" (Gibbs & Macy, 2000, p. 6) within the realm of ethics and competency. This presumption subjects clients to a therapist's mental, emotional, and ethical stability. When gatekeeping is not practiced, the propensity to jeopardize society greatly increases. Therefore, gatekeeping is more than a micro-level concept to be contained at the collegiate level, but rather a macro-level concept with long-term effects on the general public (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Moore & Urwin, 1991).

Gibbs and Macy (2000) further expounded on their view that gatekeeping is a safeguard to ensure public safety with their narration of a BSW (Bachelor of Social Work) program director's (DeJong) experience with a client (Mike). Gibbs and Macy narrated DeJong's written accounts of Mike's victimization leading to a self-destructive cycle due to him receiving a poor clinical assessment, lack of identification and diagnosis of a mental health condition, non-existent preventive services, and inconsistent case management at the hands of a social work professional (Gibbs & Macy, 2000).

In the scenario, Gibbs and Macy (2000) described Mike's downward spiral, which declined over time, going from his being free-spirited to his making poor decisions with finances, engaging in substance abuse, failing to take prescribed medication, exhibiting bizarre behavior, and eventually being hospitalized in a behavioral health unit. The scenario concluded with DeJong's thought, "Now, when I go see Mike in the psych ward, I see a young man who could just as well be my son, but I also see a person whose very life depends on the skill and professionalism of my BSW graduate" (Gibbs & Macy, 2000, p. 6). This personal experience raised further questions concerning the "what if's" of effective and ineffective gatekeeping practices.

For the purpose of this study, gatekeeping was confined to higher education; however, the term originated from related or similar disciplines and professions. Similar to the multiplicity of the term gatekeeping, there are a variety of factors and guiding theories related to gatekeeping perceptions of procedures and the practice of gatekeeping. Another historically relevant component of gatekeeping, specific to this study, are the accreditation policies and standards set by ethic boards, which mandate gatekeeping procedures and practices in social

work academia (Barlow & Coleman, 2003). Such boards, policies, and standards lay the foundation for student expectations for competency (CSWE, 2015), faculty and university responsibility to monitor student suitability, and ultimately professional behavior expectations for post-college graduates via the pathway of gatekeeping (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Holloway, 2013; Sowbel, 2012).

Gatekeeping practices constantly evolve and remain an essential aspect of social work and other service providing professions (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). The purpose of this chapter was to review existing literature that is relevant to gatekeeping procedures and practices from a historical and theoretical context in relation to this study's focus on the social work profession. In addition, the researcher reviewed current literature and conferred the complexity of defining gatekeeping, faculty and/or university responsibility for practicing gatekeeping, timelines for practicing gatekeeping, commonly practiced procedures, the role of ethnic and organizational culture in developing faculty perceptions, the advantages and disadvantages of gatekeeping, and faculty experiences with practicing gatekeeping.

Background - Historical Context

In this study, the foundational component was gatekeeping within the social work profession. With the intention of deepening the reader's understanding of the social work profession and how it has evolved from individual, community, and government efforts to an established profession with governing bodies, the researcher included a historical context into the literature review. The researcher also conducted a literature review on the origins of gatekeeping.

Evolution: From Local Welfare Work to Social Work

What is known today as social work services was once described as community, religious, and welfare support that began in the early 1500s (Glicken, 2011). The public need was great and government intervention was necessary. Because of the efforts of government and various organizations to address the social welfare issue in America, the social work profession was inevitably established. In the year of 1536, the first of many English Poor Laws were developed in England to define who should be considered poor as well as why the laws to support the poor were necessary (Glicken, 2011). Such social welfare issues included homelessness, mental and physical illness, socioeconomic status, clothing, and unemployment. In 1601, the law/act was revised resulting in the mandated training of children for employment. In addition, local parishes were charged with the responsibility to manage charitable provisions for the needy. Persons unable to work were provided with housing-almshouses, regardless of their desire to do so, as a result of their inability to work. Abled-bodied persons who did not work were imprisoned.

Over the next 300 years, the responsibility to support the poor expanded from the king, to local government, to the community. During the 300-year time span, family members were separated from one another and persons who were imprisoned for failure to gain willful employment were overworked in workhouses while failing to receive adequate nutrition (Glicken, 2011). In 1930, the Poor Laws were eradicated for the purpose of viewing the less fortunate in a more compassionate and respectful manner.

During the latter timeframe of England's Poor Laws enactments, America was facing similar social issues requiring the need for social programming (Glicken, 2011). England's Poor

Laws served as a guide for America's initial social welfare programming (Glicken, 2011; Moore & Jenkins, 2000). *Scientific Charity* provided support to larger problems while pioneers like Jane Addams founded the Hull House in Chicago to provide individualized support to the needy (Glicken, 2011; Social Work History, 2015). Soon after, what is now known as casework emerged; various organizations increased their focus on problems experienced by individuals, families, or small groups (Glicken, 2011). This specialized focus on individuals due to mental health, poverty, homelessness, or family dysfunction underpinned the development of the first friendly visitor - now termed *social work* - training in 1897 through Columbia University, previously New York School (Glicken, 2011; Social Work History, 2015).

Ethical training and monitoring of workers in its earliest form was overseen by the *Charity Organization Societies* (COS), which held the responsibility to monitor effectiveness of friendly visitors when working with the needy, as well as to ensure they practiced in a competent manner (Moore & Jenkins, 2000). Initial friendly visitor/social work training consisted of lectures, group meetings with collaboration, group study, and supervision. As cited by Moore and Jenkins (2000), since the formation of social work education, the mission has been "to guard the gate of the profession by training qualified practitioners" (p. 47). According to Glicken (2011), "By 1919, there were 17 schools of social work identifying themselves collectively as the Association of Training Schools of Professional Social Work, the precursor of today's Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)" (p. 30). As enrollment increased, the attention to improve gatekeeping increased as well (Moore & Jenkins, 2000). Early efforts aimed at student development in areas such as attitude and ethics towards the profession (Moore & Urwin, 1991; Moore & Jenkins, 2000). Overtime, as social work schools began integrating gatekeeping

practices and social work education training in their programs, the focus broadened to include guarding the gate of the profession (Glicken, 2011; Moore & Jenkins, 2000).

In response to a growing public health problem following World War I, the social work profession continued to grow by expanding their client focus from supporting poverty concerns to clinical treatment for veterans (Glicken, 2011). Through the expansion of the new clientele, "Social work began to become a profession with a coherent and logical set of professional practices and objectives, there was a movement to standardize agency practices and create core MSW curricula" (Glicken, 2011, p. 33).

In 1932, America experienced the Great Depression, at which time President Roosevelt developed the New Deal that addressed social problems with unemployment, poverty, housing, and the depleted pensions (Glicken, 2011). The New Deal was drafted with the help of his Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins (Social Work History, 2015). Secretary Perkins, a social worker "was the first woman to be appointed to the cabinet of a U.S. President" (Social Work History, 2015, p. 1). President Roosevelt's mass program development positively influenced the growth of social workers' independent roles, as well as the profession as a whole (Glicken, 2011). Under Presidents Roosevelt's leadership, "The number of social workers doubled from 40,000 to 80,000 within a decade and led to improved salaries and the need for increased educational requirements" (Glicken, 2011, p. 32).

Over the next quarter century, social work programs extended beyond the poor with welfare issues to include middle class, Caucasian workers (Glicken, 2011). By 1970s, the social work profession began to advance in ways that included dual degree programming "with schools of urban planning, public health, public policy, education, and law; the BSW as the entry-level

professional degree; and the growth of private practice among social workers" (Glicken, 2011, p.

34). Over the last 35 years, the social work profession has grown with regard to populations

served as well as required competency and ethical requirements (Glicken, 2011; Moore &

Jenkins, 2000). This advancement of the social work profession spanned from early responses to

poverty (Harper-Dorton & Lantz, 2007), working with the elderly, with prisoners, mental health,

medical social work, children and family, community and organization, and is often considered

social policy (Glicken, 2011). Providing support services to such vulnerable populations

necessitates that colleges and universities hold the primary responsibility to ensure that social

workers practice within competent and ethical realms when working with clients, hence

gatekeeping (Glicken, 2011).

Gatekeeping is the process by which universities, colleges, and/or social work faculty

follow procedures to ensure that students meet the requirements to practice as social workers

(Currer & Atherton, 2008; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Sowbel, 2012; 2008 EPAS

Handbook, 2012). Gatekeeping also provides guidelines as to what interventions may be

necessary, whether it be remediation, termination from a program, or other disciplinary action for

the purpose of ensuring social workers exhibit competence and clients are protected from their

negligent practice (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Holloway, 2013;

Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1991; Sowbel, 2012;).

Ethics and Policy

Along with the evolvement of the social work profession was also the evolvement of the

governing bodies that mandate ethics and competency requirements. In the social work

profession, expected behaviors are established by the Commission of Accreditation (COA),

employed by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and are outlined in the National Association of Social Work's (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Cobb, Ramsdell, & Hunter, 2000; Barlow & Coleman, 2003). The COA is responsible for establishing, evaluating, and conferring accreditation standards for qualified social work programs (Holloway, 2013). The commission utilizes a systematic approach to ensure uniformity, with regard to required courses and subject matter among accredited programs, which is intended to ensure that graduates have attained each competency to a level of satisfaction, regardless of educational environment (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Holloway, 2013). As cited by Koerin and Miller (1995), "The revised CSWE standards specify that these policies and practices shall include procedures for terminating a student's enrollment for reasons of academic and non-academic performance" (p. 249).

Gatekeeping

In 1943, psychologist Kurt Lewin created the process of gatekeeping (Gieseking, Mangold, Katz, & Saegert, 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). According to Gieseking et al., Lewin sought to examine the psychological and non-psychological factors present while seeking an understanding of behavior and what factors contribute to decision-making. Psychological factors included culture and past experiences, while non-psychological factors considered socioeconomic status, access to resources, and other external factors.

Gieseking et al. (2014) utilized Lewin's concept of gatekeeping to conduct a study of five different ethnic participant groups with the goal of understanding similarities and differences of food choice among the five different groups. The primary focus of Gieseking et al. (2014) was that "food comes to the table through various channels" (p. 87). Store purchase, home

gardening, delivery service, preservation, or home preparation were examples of possible channels (Gieseking et al., 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The gatekeeper holds the power to determine which channels they choose to use to get the food to the table and by what methods (Gieseking et al., 2014). Using Lewin's framework, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) noted that the process of how food moves through the channels is as important as whether it makes it through the gate or not. Results from the study rendered the wives of each group to be the gatekeepers in that they were responsible for determining what made it through the channels to the table and on what terms (Gieseking et al., 2014). Similar to Lewin's gatekeeping framework using food, is social work's process of accepting or rejecting student applicants as well as the process of remediation and/or interventions implemented when working with students who may be demonstrating behavior unsuitable for the profession (Cole, 1991).

This process of implementation is called *gatekeeping*. To date, gatekeeping is a practice used in communication media, higher education, and other entities to make decisions as to what is or is not allowed through various channels and gates (Gieseking et al., 2014). In this study, the gate was considered entry into a MSW program, being allowed to remain in a program, and/or being awarded the MSW degree.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

The development of a theoretical framework for this study was (a) to assist readers in understanding the relevance of the variables used in this study, (b) to provide a basis for the development of this study's research questions, as well as (c) to comprehend the overall rationale for conducting the study. As cited by Creswell (2012), a theory is an explanation of what researchers aim to prove, disprove, or sustain in research, as well as to offer an enhanced

understanding of a phenomenon. Simon and Goes (2011) proposed that a theory or theories are also helpful to inform the direction of a study. Comprised of one or more theories, a theoretical framework underpins the rationale for a study as well as validates the concepts of the study (Simon & Goes, 2011). In this study, the theoretical framework consisted of a combination of gatekeeping theory, perception theory, culture theory, and decision-making theory.

How effective gatekeeping practices are implemented hinges greatly upon the perception of the gatekeeper. According to Rookes and Wilson (2000), perception develops over time and is influenced by various aspects of culture, namely environmental and personal aspects. Existing literature suggests that perception and culture often affect one's decision-making processes (Saleebey, 1994; Weber & Hsee, 2000). Decision-making is a key aspect of the gatekeeping process and is therefore included in the study's theoretical framework. In this section, the researcher elaborated on the relatedness of gatekeeping theory, perception theory, culture theory, and decision-making theory.

Gatekeeping Theory

Akin to its name, the core assumption of Lewin's gatekeeping theory is embedded in a person or entity, hence the keeper, having the responsibility to guard either entry or exit through a gate or access point (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Gieseking et al., 2014). In the social work profession, the gatekeeping process is a multifunctional method of screening in suitable or out unsuitable students (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Oftentimes, this process includes pre-admission screening into an educational program that could result in admittance or being declined admittance into a program

(Currer & Atherton, 2008; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gatekeeping also consists of remediation processes when inappropriate behaviors occur, safeguarding the public from exposure to incompetent or unqualified therapists, as well as termination from social work programs when remediation is unsuccessful (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) contributed to existing gatekeeping theory literature by conducting a qualitative study with eight master's level counseling educators. Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen aimed to develop a gatekeeping theory based on research. They collected data on each educator's prior experience with, and perception towards, gatekeeping and concluded that gatekeeping theory is comprised of four phases, which include, "preadmission screening, post-admission screening, remediation plan, and remediation outcome" (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010, p. 410).

Preadmission involves an assessment of an applicant's academic ability along with their interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills were informally observed in interviews and/or casual conversation. The participants in this study demonstrated observable diverse interest when interviewing potential students such as: how they interact with one another, if they were teachable, if they were of a sound mind, or how culturally competent they appeared to be. Post-admission followed the general guideline of preadmission, an assessment of academic and interpersonal ability; however, this process continues throughout the graduate program. The remediation process was the university's plan to provide additional support to students who were

not meeting the program expectations. The plans were intended to be both supportive and a final effort to get students on track before removing them from the program.

The final stage of Ziomek-Diagel and Christensen's (2010) gatekeeping theory, remediation outcome, consisted of the gatekeeper's decision whether the remediation plan rendered improved results. This also included an assessment of whether the student followed the plan, if the student complied with the plan, but without a change in behavior, or if the plan was ineffective. The overall findings of this study suggested that by following these four phases, counseling educators, or like professionals, can better fulfill their gatekeeping roles (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Perception Theory

For the purpose of this study, perception is one of several aspects that warrant attention when considering what may or may not influence when and how faculty practice and make decisions as gatekeepers. To ensure that gatekeeping procedures are followed in an ethical manner, the interpretive processes and existing influences at play within the gatekeeper should be considered (Goodrich & Shin, 2013). This interpretive process is called *perception*. Perception is the mental impression resulting from an observation, a value laden stance, or a thought process based on one's understanding of an occurrence (Oxford, 2015). Rookes and Wilson (2000) associated sensation with perception as an inevitable component. They defined sensation as "the responses of sensory receptors and sense organs to environmental stimuli" (p. 1), and perception as the interpretive acknowledgement to a sensory input (Rookes & Wilson, 2000). Having divulged in extensive phsyiological studies of the senses, psychologists have centered their focus on vision as the primary sensory aspect of perception (Rookes & Wilson,

2000). Ehiobuche (2012) intergrated the two and described perception as, "a process through which people receive and interpret information from the environment" (p. 15).

According to Rookes and Wilson (2000), theorists use two primary methods to explain how information is received and processed: top-down and bottom-up. Both methods deal with sensory and perception; however, the positioning of either concept determines which approach is at work. When processing using a bottom-up approach, input through the senses or visual input is at the forefront, which guides how a situation is perceived. For example, using a bottom-up method in gatekeeping, the gatekeeper would process a particular behavior based on exactly what was seen before interpreting the behavior and forming a judgement. The top-down method is just the opposite, and places the initial focus of input on cognition. Thus, the gatekeeper would explore cognitive factors before forming judgement about a particular behavior. Using the top-down process, perceptions are determined using memory recall and very little focus is placed on sensory input. Top-down methods would draw from culture and past experiences.

Theorist James Gibson, established the *theory of direct perception*, which favors bottom-up processing (Rookes & Wilson, 2000). Gibson's theory arrived at perception through in-the-moment, visual sensory inputs (Ehiobuche, 2012; Rookes & Wilson, 2000). Critics opposed Gibson's theory due to the possibility of an illusion, suggesting that perceptions can be incorrect if the sensory input is inaccurate (Rookes & Wilson, 2000). According to Rookes and Wilson (2000), Gregory's *indirect theory of perception* accepts Gibson's theory, however, it deduces the emphasis on sensory input. Gregory's top-down theory views perception as an educated guess, or hypothesis, comprised of memory recall and past experiences (Ehiobuche, 2012; Rookes & Wilson, 2000).

Criticism to Gregory's theory is the absence of details explaining how one should establish a hypothesis, as well as what next steps should be taken when the perception is inaccurate (Ehiobuche, 2012). When faculty consider whether student behavior warrants gatekeeping implementation, it is important to accurately access the behavior. Different perceptions held by faculty about the concerning behavior will rely heavily on the faculty's perception about the problem. As the next section will explore, culture and past experiences contribute greatly to how individuals perceive input as well as in how day-to-day decisions are made. Being mindful of the obligatory duty of social work faculty, administration, and like professions to assess student suitability, it is imperative to understand any and all influencing factors of the gatekeepers perception.

Culture & Culture Theory

With the recent emphasis on culture and its influence on development (Hanson, 2004), cognition (Ojalehto & Medin, 2015), and behavior (Saleebey, 1994), defining culture is a complex task. A general, non-exhaustive definition of culture consists of family traditions, social experiences, shared artifacts, learned behaviors, values, and shared practices and beliefs (Lum, 2004; Oxford American, 2006). More than a set of inflexible behaviors, Hanson (2004) described culture as "a framework through which actions are filtered or checked as individuals go about daily life" (p. 4). Similiary, Saleebey (1994) credited the pathway in which we "receive, organize, rationalize, and understand our experiences in the world" (p. 352) to culture.

Contrary to the belief of many (Hanson, 2004), culture develops over time, as opposed to being innately inherited (Saleebey, 1994). As cited in Saleebey (1994), culture becomes a mute point when it fails to contribute to ones systematic process of providing reason for action by

"situating its underlying intentional states in [this] interpretive system" (p. 352). Without permission, culture takes root deep at an early age and contributes to the development of behavior patterns throughout life (Saleebey, 1994). These learned behaviors ultimately become habits and subconscious ways of making decisions and responding to situations (Saleebey, 1994).

Using Kurt Lewin's gatekeeping theory, Shoemaker and Vos (2009) theorized gatekeeping, in relation to culture, as a complex process that includes "studying the characteristics of people-their demographic profiles, their life experiences, their personal values and attitudes, and their work experiences" (p. 31). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) further suggested that gatekeepers are often influenced by culture or personal life experiences, as well as organizational culture. With regard to the shared set of beliefs and practices in the workplace, Shoemaker and Vos' (2009) theory is supported within the social work profession as evidenced by reported feelings that gatekeeping efforts are contrary to the "helping" concept of the profession (Grady, 2009). Because social workers practice from a strengths-based perspective, social work educators struggle between terminating a student from educational programs versus viewing them as a work in progress (Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Grady, 2009; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Sowbel, 2012; Tam & Coleman, 2011).

Although Gibbs and Macy (2000) recommended that gatekeepers work to balance the difficult task of guarding the gate of the profession with establishing a relationship with students in a professional manner, the struggle between organizational culture and gatekeeping responsibilities continues. Other research supports the reluctance and diverse perceptions of educators to enforce gatekeeping practicing in attempts to avoid conflict with colleagues,

students, court involvement, and other consequences they perceive to be negative (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). For the purpose of this study, it is important to be aware of the presence of individual culture as well as the possibility of organizational culture to affect gatekeeping practices among MSW faculty.

Decision-Making Theory

Gatekeeping requires decision-making action on behalf of the gatekeeper (Cole & Lewis, 1993). For gatekeepers, having to make the decision whether to expel a student from a program, or to determine that an applicant is not a good fit for the social work profession is a complicated process (Currer & Atherton, 2008). Currer and Atherton (2008) conducted a two-fold study that (a) upheld the importance of a university having set procedures in place for gatekeeping practices, as well as (b) associated the decision-making concept of suitability to that of ethical judgement. They recognized the influences in the decision-making process, such as personal values, gender, cognitions, or culture, and made a call for balance between the decision-making process and ethics of the profession. Because the heavy-weighted component of gatekeeping lies with the task of decision-making, it was therefore necessary to understand decision-making theory.

According to Weber and Hsee (2000), *decision modes* is a term used to describe "culture-specific preferences for particular methods or strategies for arriving at decisions and distinguished between analytic, rule-based, and automatic decision modes" (p. 45). Relevant to this study, *analytic or cost-benefit-based decision-making* is a decision-making process that involves considering the benefit, as well as examining the cost or consequences of ones decision (Weber & Hsee, 2000). *Category-based decision-making* is a process where experiences are

compartmentalized and later recalled from memory when a situation arises (Weber & Hsee, 2000). Past experiences are assigned a mental category, to be associated with "if" this particular situation reoccurs, and past behaviors or responses are similarly categorized, to be referred to as "then," which guides how the situaiton will be handled.

Weber and Hsee (2000) conducted a study that examined the relationship between culture, individual judgement, and decision-making. The authors sought to contribute to the body of existing literature by specifically examining similarities and differences between various cultures and the processes used by different cultural groups when making decisions. In doing so, they found that certain cultures, such as the Asian culture, tend to refer to precedents and cultural traditions when making decisions. Persons of western culture tend to make decisions in an individualistic manner, with little to no regard for past experiences.

The role of culture in developing perception does not stand alone when it comes to decision-making. Wildavsky (1987) argued that decision-making processes lend to the ongoing development of one's culture. Gatekeepers must be aware of this influence in order to make ethical decisions about a student's fit into programs (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Goodrich & Shin, 2013). Goodrich and Shin (2013) recommended that gatekeepers reflect inward with regard to values, beliefs, and culture just as much as they view the influence of these factors on the student's behavior in question.

<div align="center">**Current Literature**</div>

Gatekeeping Defined

As evidenced by existing literature, defining gatekeeping remains a daunting task. Currer and Atherton (2008) defined gatekeeping as the ethical practice of qualified practitioners to

establish and follow strict guidelines when making decisions about student suitability for the social work profession (Adkins, 2000). They also attempted to address the challenge of universally defining student suitability, concluding that various academic, non-academic, maturity level (Miller & Koerin, 2001; Sussman, Bailey, Richardson, & Granner, 2014), and personality factors are all grounds for deeming a student or potential student unsuitable for the profession. Currer and Atherton further noted that this lack of uniformity among faculty to define gatekeeping and suitability raises questions about decision-making practices of faculty.

Counseling, a similar profession, correspondingly defined gatekeeping as the faculty's charge to intervene when students display inept skills and abilities required by the field (Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). In addition, Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) defined gatekeeping as the process by which educators intervene and support students who fail to exhibit aptness within the program. According to Sowbel (2012), gatekeeping is the ethical duty of social work faculty to screen-out ill-equipped students who present a potential risk to future clients. Screening out may consist of denied entry into a program, as well as termination in the midst of a program (Sowbel, 2012). Existing literature represents the view that gatekeeping is not an individual checkpoint, but rather an ongoing process (Miller & Koerin, 2001) that includes "multiple processes, procedures, interventions, and strategies fulfilling the function" (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013, p. 288).

Along with defining gatekeeping is the significance of discussing its primary function. According to Elpers and Fitzgerald (2013), gatekeeping serves the primary functions of supporting students throughout the educational process as well as to guard the gate of entry into the profession. Moore and Urwin (1991) described the function of gatekeeping as assessing

"potential for the profession and readiness to enter the field, the cornerstone of social work education" (p. 104). Madden (2000) contended that the primary functions of gatekeeping are "quality control, program integrity, and protection of those seeking services from graduates" (p. 135). Currer and Atherton (2008) attested that gatekeeping is a multifaceted means of supporting students by helping them develop into social work professionals, as well as gatekeepers to the profession and the public as a whole. Urwin et al. (2006) referenced gatekeeping as a support measure for students instead of a punitive measure. In their study, which developed gatekeeping measures, 38 out of 57 students successfully completed their program with remediation support (Urwin et al., 2006).

Hutchens et al. (2013) provided four functions that counselor educators should include when developing gatekeeping procedures,

> First, counselor education programs by their very nature have a responsibility to support their students. Second, counselor educators need to recognize and appreciate the subjective nature of clinical supervision. Third, educators need to place the interests of future client in the forefront of how they evaluate students during the clinical and academic phases of their programs. Finally, an effective gatekeeping process needs to provide students with the opportunity to respond to and address concerns (Frame, 1995). (p. 85)

Variances in defining (Currer & Atherton, 2008), as well as clarifying the purpose for gatekeeping, continues to serve as a source of confusion for social work and counseling educators. In addition, failure to establish clear-cut expectations and potential consequences increases the risk of legal involvement for universities (Cole & Lewis, 2000). In the case of

Corso v. Creighton University (1983), a student was dismissed from a medical program due to misconduct. Although the behavior was egregious, the court focused on the contractual relationship held between the university and the student and the program handbook was the source of proof that faculty were not abiding by admission criteria. The court instructed the university to grant the student due process based on the conclusion that the university's actions were not explicitly clear (Cole & Lewis, 1993). Making sure that universities abide by their handbooks and policies is helpful to serve as grounds for dismissing a student, to guide gatekeeping practices, as well as to provide a defense against students suing the program for deviating from the admission criteria (Cole & Lewis, 2000).

Gatekeeping Responsibilities

Despite the consensus that social workers are front line responders responsible to fulfill the role of gatekeeper (Cole, 1991), assigning the responsibility to one particular job position would be short of a miracle. It is common practice that all faculty including admission advisors, field directors, instructors, and administration, in both social work and counseling fields, are primarily responsible for fufilling the role of gatekeeper (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). This responsibility is guided by the NASW Code of Ethics (2008) as well as counseling and other professional standards and ethics boards, based on the assumption that faculty hold the qualifications necessary to make remediation and termination decisions (Currer & Atherton, 2008). Gibbs and Macy (2000) took a holistic approach at outlining the shared responsibility for gatekeeping. Included in their list of responsible persons and entities are "students, faculty, field instructors, academic administrators, quality assurance entities, and the clientele" (Gibbs & Macy, 2000, p. 8).

Students. It is presumed that as students are accepted into a program, through a formal admissions process, they view this as an accomplishment and become invested in the profession and tend to report misconduct of their peers (Gibbs & Macy, 2000). To assist students with this process, the University of Kansas developed a program, *Social Work Students Concerned About Retaining Ethics* (S.C.A.R.E.), which allowed students to partake in gatekeeping responsibilities (Gibbs & Macy, 2000).

Faculty. In the face of conflict between gatekeeping responsibilities and the desire to connect with students, faculty hold the responsibility to monitor students' submitted work, classroom behavior, informally assess their mental ability and their emotional state, as well as ensure that they comply with the NASW Code of Ethics and the profession's core competencies (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015; Gibbs & Macy, 2000). Cole and Lewis (1993) charged social work educators with the primary responsibility to ensure that graduates are prepared to practice ethically as professionals (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Urwin et al., 2006).

Field instructors. A field instructor is not an employee of the university, but rather a supervising employee at the agency where a student is completing her or his field practicum. Sowbel (2011) assigned the field instructor with the primary responsibility of determining suitability for the field (Miller & Koerin, 2001; Sowbel, 2012; Sussman et al., 2014). Correspondingly, Miller and Koerin (2001) delegated the task of gatekeeping to the field director as well, but clearly stated that the institutions teaching team should be a readily available for support. At times, this may be a difficult task for the field instructor, as minimal student-teacher interaction takes place within the class setting for traditional learning environments and can be

absent in the online environment all together (Sowbel, 2011). Another challenge with the field instructor holding the primary role of gatekeeping is their tendency to view the relationship with the student through a therapeutic lens (Gibbs & Macy, 2000). Viewing the student's role at the agency as temporary staff as opposed to a learning experience poses another challenge for assigning field instructors the primary responsibility of gatekeeper (Gibbs & Macy, 2000). It is recommended that social work faculty ensure that the field instructors are aware of their role as gatekeepers and that they maintain rapport through the student's field experience (Gibbs & Macy, 2000).

      Academic administrators. Oftentimes university administrators are far removed from the day to day functions of gatekeeping (Gibbs & Macy, 2000). In such cases, their role includes the establishment of setting pre-screening and post-screening procedures.

      Quality assurance entities. In counseling and the social work profession, governing and accreditation bodies, such CSWE and COA, hold the responsibility to establish expected behaviors (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Cobb et al., 2000; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995). Standards for expectations are outlined in the National Association of Social Work's (NASW) Code of Ethics (Currer & Atherton, 2008). Therefore, quality assurance entities hold a great responsibility to set the expectation for overall gatekeeping, but no specific role in implementing gatekeeping directly with students.

      To establish gatekeeping responsibility, it is recommended that gatekeeping policies and procedures be documented in handbooks (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Failure to do so often results in a ambiguity of responsibilities and inadequate implementation of gatekeeping practices (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012;

Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Furthermore, this lack of consistency contributes to the array of barriers that obstruct the uniformity of gatekeeping practice, such as decreased enrollment, fear of being sued, or the threat of job security in both traditional and distant learning envornments (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012).

Gatekeeping Timelines

A review of the literature indicated that variant viewpoints exist with regard to when the gatekeeping process should take place. Most institutions agree the process should begin at the time students express interest in the program and expand into field placement, as well as class settings (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Cole & Lewis, 2000; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Grady, 2009; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Gatekeeping that is acted on at the time of a student's application may occur at either the school admissions level or within the social work department (Sowbel, 2012). Due to the pressure social work programs endure to maintain high enrollment numbers, students are rarely rejected, regardless of suitability concerns (Sowbel, 2012). This creates a significant gatekeeping concern, as most students receive passing grades once admitted into the program (Sowbel, 2011), signifying faculty approval of student suitability for the field (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Reeves & Reeves, 2008). Sowbel (2012) argued that during a student's field internship is the best time to practice gatekeeping.

Miller and Koerin (2001) developed a framework intended to serve as a guide for social work faculty to reference when fulfilling their gatekeeping responsibilities. They charged the field instructor with the weightier responsibility to assess for student suitability. Field practicum is the first opportunity for students to put into practice what they have been learning about social

work. Consequently, complaints of non-compliance with the Code of Ethics is most common in field education, warranting thorough training and preparation of field instructors as gatekeepers. As cited by Miller and Koerin (2001), "Sixty-seven percent (67%) of field instructors surveyed by Hipple and Harrington (1995) expressed a need and a desire for formal training in gatekeeping" (p. 10). Each of these gatekeeping instances represent potential benefits of gatekeeping practices throughout students' educational experiences. This is without regard for the student's educational setting, online or tranditional.

Gatekeeping Practices

In this study, gatekeeping practices refer to actual steps that have been taken to evaluate student suitability during preadmission, throughout the program, and upon exit (Adkins, 2000; Moore & Urwin, 1991). It also refers to steps involved with remediation and other consequences when students demonstrate unacceptable behavior in a program. Student suitability is measured during different stages of their academic career in a variety of ways, which include both academic and non-academic methods (Barlow & Coleman, 2003; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Sowbel, 2011; Sowbel, 2012). A non-exhaustive list of suitability measures includes observed behavior, evaluations, interest essays, a review of prior school records, personal issues, and reference checks, along with faculty and field supervisor input (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Sowbel, 2011, 2012).

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse developed a diverse interview panel who were charged with the responsibility to interview all applicants (Hagar, 2000). The entry process required applicants to complete a short interview and a brief essay (Hagar, 2000). Faculty then consulted one another to collectively discuss their experience during the interview process. The

panel concluded that the method was helpful to allow practitioners to be involved with the selection process and viewed the collaboration as beneficial among faculty. The collaboration component aligns with the core value of the profession (Moore & Urwin, 1991).

Remediation is another method of addressing student suitability concerns (Hutchens et al., 2013). Remediation efforts include "further study, which may include repeating a course, to address an identified deficiency. Others may call for intensified supervision of a student by a faculty member" (Hutchens et al., 2013, p. 86). Other remediation methods included meeting with a counselor to process personal issues (Grady, 2009) or taking a short break from the program (Hutchens et al., 2013).

Sowbel (2011) recommended that field instructor and field supervisor evaluations be used to review student progress and assess suitability for the field. Sowbel piloted an evaluation measure used by field instructors, which stated that over 50% of field practicum students receive an excellent evaluation rating. In support of existing literature, Sowbel settled on the likelihood that students are receiving ratings that are inflated or higher than what they actually deserve.

Although some might view the timing of an exit interview or exam too late, Adkins (2000) recommended the use of an exit exam as a final effort to protect the public from unsuitable professional conduct. Opposite of using assessments to evaluate students is the practice of using portfolio assessment (Adkins, 2000). This method consists of students storing their work, as a portfolio (Adkins, 2000). The portfolio assessment allows gatekeepers to view student growth over an established period of time (Adkins, 2000).

Termination or expulsion is the final method utilized when attempts at remediation have been unsuccessful (Koerin & Miller, 1995). Frame and Stevens-Smith (1995) developed a

process that aimed to support students through a systematic process that formally evaluated students three times before consulting with the dismissal committee to terminate a student. Half of the faculty who participated in the studies found the structured process to be helpful (Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995).

Gatekeeping Procedures

Gatekeeping procedures communicate an educational institution's formal or informal criterion that is followed when monitoring, evaluating, and determining if a student is suitable for a profession. Best practice methods necessitate that social work programs establish concrete procedures and policies via assigned faculty roles, student handbook, and/or program guides (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Ideally, such procedures and policies should be formally written. Cole and Lewis (2000) ranked the practice of establishing entrance, exit, and expectation criteria as number one when starting a social work program. Existing literature consistently has recommended that institutions explicitly articulate program expectations, the profession's competencies (Lumadue & Duffey, 1999), and potential consequences when those expectations are not met at the start of the BSW or MSW program (Cole & Lewis, 1993; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013).

Many colleges and universities establish committees to address concerns with students who may be facing program dismissal (Koerin & Miller, 1995). Field directors, program chairs, involved faculty, and advisors are often members of such committees (Koerin & Miller, 1995). Koerin and Miller (1995) conducted a national survey aimed at exploring non-academic circumstances and behaviors resulting in program termination. Demographic information such as programs with and without existing termination policies, specific behaviors contributing to

termination, and factors impacting the establishment of such policies were surveyed as well (Koerin & Miller, 1995). Of participating respondents, 27 of the 81 participants stated that they have a policy used to terminate students for nonacademic behavior concerns, and 54 of 81 stated that they did not have a policy in place. More than 50% of programs without a policy expressed not having intentions to develop a policy because it was not necessary, having faith in the general program or university policies, and having a lack of confidence that the university would consent to a policy that would terminate students from social work programs. In all, 41% of respondents not having a policy shared having intentions to develop a policy to legally protect the university, to ensure students are afforded due process, and to formally address faculty concerns with student behaviors. Of the five categories used to analyze respondents' reasons for terminating students for non-academic behavior, ethics ranked as the most prevalent reason that students are dismissed. Mental health/substance abuse ranked second most common, and performance during field practicum was the third most common reason for nonacademic removal from the program. Both concerns with student ethical behavior and aiming to ensure students received due process were primary motivations for developing a formal policy.

Key Factors to Consider

Online vs. Traditional Learning Environments

In the field of social work, students attain competency through class instruction, discussions, role play, peer-to-peer sharing, supervision, field practice, as well as ongoing individualized feedback and support (Reeves & Reeves, 2008). Students are expected to attain competency as well as to master all core competencies before being awarded a Master's degree. Many, but not all, of these characteristics are implementable within the online learning

environments. Reeves and Reeves (2008) conducted a study regarding online learning design and suggested that online instructors should seek to provide instruction that "involves shaping desirable behaviors through the arrangement of stimuli, responses, feedback and reinforcement" (p. 49). Reeves and Reeves (2008) concluded that the development, assessment, and constant improvement of social work online education is necessary to meet student needs. The literature indicated that online programs provide necessary instruction to include the opportunity for responses and feedback through reflective discussions (Bye et al., 2009; Maidment, 2005; Reeves & Reeves, 2008); however, the researcher was unaware of any studies that directly examined the concept of reinforcement or human interaction offered through fully web-based, online education. Freddolino and Sutherland (2000) conducted a study comparing online and traditional learning and settled on the fact that online learning will remain a constant presence for social work education; however, they posed the following question, "What is the right mix of human and technological supports required to create comparable quality learning environments for undergraduate and graduate social work education?" (p. 127). This question remains unanswered.

As cited in Russel (2012), online education has increased yearly by 19%, exceeding all other forms of learning styles. This rapid advancement comes as no surprise, given students' perception of convenience, increased accessibility, flexibility of schedule, and improved practical outcomes (Bye et al., 2009; Coe & Elliott, 1999; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Consequently, schools offering traditional social work education programs in face–to-face-class settings, are experiencing a decline in enrollment due to the previously mentioned benefits associated with online programs. In an effort to remain competitive with

online programs, traditional programs are now offering fully web-based online programs, as well. Unlike the motivation to evolve with instructional advancements, a thorough review of the literature rendered no specified gatekeeping policies to assure program effectiveness in the online educational environment.

Online education, especially in social work, greatly expands the opportunity for prospective students to obtain a college education and ultimately satisfy the social deficit of providing competent social work services in rustic areas (Coe & Elliott, 1999). Due to the time constraints mandated by traditional programs, which meet face-to-face or in person, such as location, inflexible class schedule, and general life obligations, online learning serves as a solution that allows students to enroll in programs they would have otherwise been unable to attend (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Reeves & Reeves, 2008; Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Depending on if a student lives within close proximity to the college or university, some students enrolled in online educational programs have the opportunity to meet with faculty as necessary. Moreover, considering online instructional design, existing social workers and anticipated graduates, hold an increased advantage to gain higher-order thinking and practical exposure as opposed to ritualistic exams and essay writing (Bye et al., 2009; Reeves & Reeves, 2008).

In more rustic regions, where the option to physically access the instructor is not an option, the negative aspect of no human interaction exists (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Considering the recent influx of online MSW social work education programs over the last decade (Wilke & Vinton, 2006), the likelihood of a student having limited access to faculty is high (Maidment, 2005). The predisposition of inaccessibility not only limits support to the student, but also creates implications for purposeful gatekeeping practices.

While traditional programs have technology support departments available to assist both the instructor and students, technology issues, such as access, usability, support, and curriculum development, are expressively denoted as a primary barrier within online education (Coe & Elliott, 1999; Maidment, 2005; Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Undesired solitude of faculty is another primary concern for online education (Russell, 2012). While striving to remain abreast of techonology advances and to assure student inclusion, instructors find it necessary to be flexible in pedagogy styles (Maidment, 2005). Maidment (2005) described the flexibility of instructors as a conversion that reduces the instructor's hierarchical role to that of facilitator and customary student roles become peer-to-peer learning (Bye et al., 2009)

Akin to social work's NASW (2008) ethical standard of cultural competence and social diversity, the implications of culture driven behaviors, such as a student's outlook towards education, willingness to participate, or decision-making skills, remain a barrier to online social work education (Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Maidment, 2005; Reeves & Reeves, 2008). In the light of gatekeeping, culture driven practices may be misconstrued as inaptness for the social work and related professions (Goodrich & Shin, 2013), which may present as oppressive acts towards students. In such cases, the lack of human interaction accessibility could have negative outcomes for online students. Thus, it is imperative that educators continually enhance their level of cultural sensitivity and cognizance within online learning environments, especially as gatekeepers (Goodrich & Shin, 2013; Maidment, 2005).

Faculty Perception and Barriers to Effective Gatekeeping

Several barriers exist that prevent effective gatekeeping practices. Administrative pressure to increase and maintain enrollment is a barrier to effective gatekeeping, as gatekeeping

practices often result in removal of a student (Sowbel, 2011; Sowbel, 2012). Removal of students results in lower enrollment and ultimately has decreased financial revenue for the university.

Additional literature examined court cases initiated by students who were removed from their program due to gatekeeping practices (Hutchens et al., 2013; Sowbel, 2012). Hitchens et al. (2013) conducted a study examining recent court cases in which students filed a law suit against their university due to a violation of their constitutional rights and freedom of speech when making various lay statements during class, which prompted gatekeeping practices. In each case, counseling faculty enacted gatekeeping procedures, which resulted in program removal, based on what was viewed as discrimination practices (Hutchens et al., 2013). Legal involvement or fear of such is a barrier to faculty fulfilling their gatekeeping responsibilities (Tam & Coleman, 2011). Such history is presumed to deter faculty from fulfilling their gatekeeping roles with integrity and fidelity (Hutchens et al., 2013; Sowbel, 2012). This supports the stance that educators sometimes avoid gatekeeping for fear of being sued by students (Hutchens et al., 2013; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

Another barrier to efficient gatekeeping practices is the ambiguity of educator roles and accountabilities (Sowbel, 2012). Many faculty members view gatekeeping as conflictual with the nurturing, compassionate, core values of social work, which include a focus on the importance of human relationships (Currer & Atherton, 2008; NASW, 2008; Sowbel, 2012).

Implications

Gatekeeping serves three primary purposes: to guard the profession (Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Moore & Urwin, 1991), to support students (Ziomek-Daigle &

Christensen, 2010), and to reduce the risk of harm to future clients due to unfit professionals providing unethical therapeutic services (CSWE, 2015; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1991; Sowbel, 2012). Thus, gatekeeping practices within traditional and online social work education remain an essential, vital aspect of the profession (Sowbel, 2012; Urwin et al., 2006; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Regardless of the learning environment, traditional or online, students are expected to master all 10 competencies before being awarded a Master's degree. Collectively, faculty and universities bear the burden of assuring that students master all 10 competencies, while meeting the accredited program's expectations as outlined by the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPA; CSWE, 2015).

There is existing research regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices in traditional learning environments; however, since the first MSW web-based program began in 2002 (Wilke & Vinton, 2006), few studies have explored gatekeeping practices specific to non-traditional, online students. With the advancement of the social work profession, which now offers students the option to attain a Master's degree online, along with the mandated responsibility of faculty and universities to assess and monitor student suitability for the profession (Adkin, 2000; CSWE, 2015; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Holloway, 2013; Sowbel, 2012), this study brings to light existing perceptions and practices with regard to gatekeeping.

There appears to be a lack of prior studies that assess these differences of perception and practice between online and traditional MSW faculty as they pertain to gatekeeping. Similarly, the researcher found no prior studies that investigated the level of relationship between online and traditional MSW faculty perception of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping. For

this reason, the researcher proposed that this study provide both an exploratory and a foundational contribution to the body of existing literature.

From a foundational stance, the study seems to be necessary, when considering future implications to develop specific gatekeeping procedures in both traditional and online learning environments. The findings of this study will not only benefit the social work profession, but may also render implication for similar professions charged with gatekeeping, such as counseling, nursing, and law.

Conclusion

In this review of the literature, the researcher discoursed the historical aspects of the evolvement of the social work profession into both a profession as well as a stand alone entity in education. The researcher also conversed the orgination of gatekeeping and created a link to gatekeeping in social work and like professions; concluding that in the social work profession, gatekeeping practices are essential, especially at the graduate level (Council on Social Work Education, 2015; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel L. , 2011; Sowbel, 2012; Wilke & Vinton, 2006; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

In establishing a theoretical framework, it was concluded that the framework was comprised of gatekeeping theory, perception theory, culture theory, and decision-making theory. Further research examined and conferred the complexity of defining gatekeeping, timelines, discrepancies with responsibilites, variance of procedures and practices, and advantages and disadvantages of gatekeeping. The conclusion was that there is a lack of existing research that substantiates the need for this study. It is, therefore, concluded that such research pertaining to

the relationship between gatekeeping practices and gatekeeping perceptions in both traditional

and online settings is necessary.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In the last decade, online education has increased yearly by 19%, exceeding all other forms of learning styles (Russell, 2012; Wilke & Vinton, 2006). In an effort to remain competitive with online programs, universities are now offering fully web-based online as well as traditional programing (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). Existing research supports the advancement of traditional learning environments to online programming; however, the perception of MSW social work faculty, as it relates to gatekeeping in the online environment, appear to be nonexistent (Gilbert, 2014). The purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices in fully accredited, online and traditional Master's level social work programs.

In this study, gatekeeping is operationally defined as the method by which social work faculty fulfill their professional responsibility to ethically examine student suitability during pre-admission into a MSW program as well as ongoing until graduation. Student suitability is referred to as the student's ability to practice within the ethical guidelines set forth by the National Association of Social Work (NASW, 2008), along with the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS; 2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012). Suitability is further defined as the satisfactory level of competency as set forth by the EPAS (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012). All accredited social work programs are responsible to ensure graduates attain a satisfactory level of competency (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Holloway, 2013).

The Commission of Accreditation (COA), which is employed by the CSWE, is responsible for establishing, evaluating, and conferring accreditation standards to qualified social work programs (Holloway, 2013). The commission utilizes a systematic approach to ensure uniformity among accredited programs, in either online or traditional instructional settings (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Holloway, 2013). According to Koerin and Miller (1995), current CSWE standards state that university policies and guidelines "shall include procedures for terminating a student's enrollment for reasons of academic and non-academic performance" (p. 249).

In this study, the researcher also sought to examine the relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping responsibilities and their practice of gatekeeping procedures in online and traditional social work education. The responsibility of social work educators to assess and evaluate a student's fit for the profession of social work is, and has always been, of great significance to this service providing profession (Sowbel, 2012). This is primarily because of the nature of social work and the role that social workers play as service providers. In their career field, social workers have access to vulnerable and at-risk populations. This supports the position that social work educators are accountable for ensuring that gatekeeping practices are implemented within the educational environment prior to awarding graduate degrees (Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010).

The researcher proposed that the findings from this study would not only add to the dearth of existing literature, regarding social work faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and responsibilities, but would also contribute to the body of research with regard to gatekeeping. This research usage extends beyond the profession of social work and, therefore,

may be adaptable to other higher learning programs for helping professions, including nursing, education, and counseling.

Research Design

The collection of data, using multiple methods, has continued to evolve since the early 1930s (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), the original intent for using multiple methods was to better understand a problem, without necessarily mixing the methods by which the data were collected. For example, researchers gathered one type of data, quantitative, from multiple sources, observations, secondary data, or surveys (Creswell, 2012). In 1979, Jick introduced the idea of integrating research methods, termed qualitative research and quantitative research, by gathering data from different data sets such as surveys and interviews (Jick, 1979; Creswell, 2012). The mix of qualitative data with quantitative data is presently called mixed methods research.

Mixed methods research design is a process by which researchers gather and analyze quantitative, numerical, and qualitative, non-numerical, data in a single study (Creswell, 2012). One common reason for using mixed methods is to gain a deeper understanding of a problem or phenomenon than what has been presented through numerical data alone (Creswell, 2012). Researchers who simultaneously collect qualitative and quantitative data for analysis and interpretive purposes utilize an embedded mixed methods design (Creswell, 2012). In the study, qualitative data was helpful to support, as in to expound on, the quantitative data analysis findings.

This study examined differences between the perceptions and practices of gatekeeping between MSW traditional and MSW online faculty, as well as examined whether there was a

correlation between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping in their learning environments. A correlational design is used to "measure the degree of association (or relationship) between two or more variables or sets of scores" (Creswell, 2012, p. 338). The correlational research design was used to determine whether there was a relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their actual practice of gatekeeping. The researcher examined both the quantitative and qualitative data from the survey as a means of triangulating the data and ultimately enhancing the outcome of the study (Creswell, 2012).

Definitions of Variables

For the purposes of this study, online and traditional faculty responses were compared. The research questions assessing the differences between these two groups were:

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of online MSW faculty?

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping practices and those practices of online MSW faculty?

The variables in this study were MSW faculty perceptions of online and traditional gatekeeping procedures and faculty practices. Faculty perception was operationally defined as the thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of faculty towards gatekeeping in both online and traditional learning environments. For the purpose of this study, gatekeeping procedures was operationally defined as a set of rules or regulations to be followed when a MSW student's academic performance, or non-academic behavior, are deemed to be inappropriate and/or unacceptable (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gatekeeping procedures are guided by the COA (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012). Examples of gatekeeping procedures include requirements to retake a course, specific research assignments to

address the area of deficit, or removal from a program pre-admission requirements and field

class evaluations (Hutchens et al., 2013). In addition, gatekeeping practices consist of having

currently or previously taken action to follow the set of rules or regulations required of MSW

faculty when a MSW student's academic performance, or non-academic behavior, are deemed to

be inappropriate and/or unacceptable by a college or university guidelines. The research

questions assessing the relationship between variables were:

1. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping
   and their practice of gatekeeping?

2. What is the relationship between online MSW faculty perception of gatekeeping and
   their practice of gatekeeping?

Figure 1. The predictor and criterion variables utilized in the Correlation research design in this study. Adapted from "*Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*," by J. Creswell.

The predictor variable in the correlation research design of this study was MSW faculty perception. "A predictor variable is a variable used to make a forecast about an outcome in correlational research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 341). For the purpose of this study, faculty perception is operationally defined as the thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of faculty towards gatekeeping in both online and traditional learning environments. In this study, the criterion variable, or "the outcome being predicted in correlational research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 341) was the MSW faculty's actual practice of gatekeeping procedures.

Increasing Validity and Reliability: Threats to Internal Validity

In this study, the researcher sought to explore differences between traditional and online MSW faculty members' perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and gatekeeping practices. The researcher also assessed the correlation between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their actual practice of gatekeeping procedures. The embedded mixed method, correlation research design used in this study was non-experimental.

Control and treatment groups do not exist in non-experimental studies (Trochim, 2006). In the absence of a control or treatment group, non-experimental studies explore attitudes and other outcomes unrelated to causation of an independent variable (Trochim, 2006); therefore, threats to internal validity were insignificant (Trochim, 2006). Even still, an internal threat to validity exists in the selection of participants. In this study, participants were not randomly selected, which could potentially pose a threat to validity due to the possibility of unequal groups. Confounding variables (Creswell, 2012) such as prior experiences with gatekeeping, personality, length of time in the profession, employment status, or life experiences may influence the perception of MSW faculty towards gatekeeping. The researcher included this threat to internal validity in this study limitations as the confounding variable is beyond the researcher's ability to control.

While there was no expectation of any extraneous events or history, dissolution of the Social Work Department, which granted access to the national database would present an internal validity threat, as well. This researcher had the support of more than one social work program to decrease this internal validity threat.

The researcher established face validity with the instrument used in the study by piloting the survey with five different experts in the areas of gatekeeping and social work. Threats to external validity were overcome with the stratified sample. The study used convenience sampling, which decreased external validity due to inconvenience for participants. The participants in this study were selected from the Council of Social Work, accredited, Masters-level accreditation directory, which is a publicly listed directory.

Research Design Procedures

Prior to beginning the methodology procedures used in this study, the researcher identified the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty with regard to gatekeeping procedures and practices in fully accredited, online and traditional Master's level social work programs. In this study, the researcher also aimed to examine the relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping procedures in online and traditional social work education. The purpose of this study guided the development of the research questions to be examined. The research questions assessing the differences and relatedness between online and traditional MSW social work faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices were:

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of online MSW faculty?

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping practices and those of online MSW faculty?

3. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

4. What is the relationship between online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and
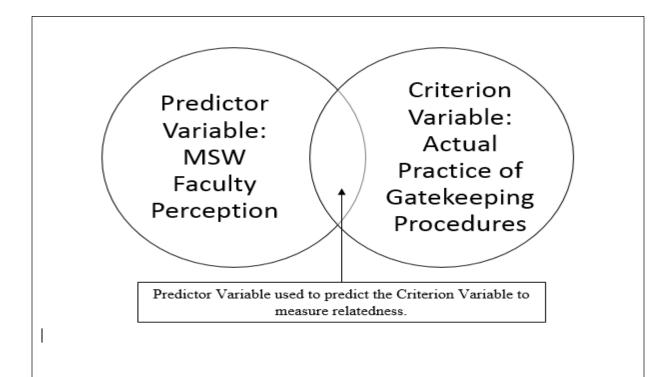
their practice of gatekeeping?

Figure 2. The variables utilized in this study's Embedded Mixed Methods research design.
Adapted from "*Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative
and Qualitative Research,*" by J. Creswell.

Figure 2 illustrates the embedded mixed methods research design procedures that were

followed in this study. The researcher identified the online and traditional variables, MSW

faculty perception of gatekeeping procedures and practices. The researcher, with permission from the author, adopted and modified Tam's (2004) gatekeeping survey to develop a mixed methods survey instrument for this study. Questions designed to answer the quantitative research questions of this study were added to a Likert-type scale survey, while short-answer questions were added to help answer the qualitative research questions. The survey questions gaged faculty perceptions and practices pertaining to gatekeeping procedures, the primary role responsible for implementing gatekeeping practices, and the correlation between faculty perception and practice.

Participants

Prior to beginning the data collection process, the researcher obtained approval to conduct this study from the University of St. Francis Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher conducted this study remotely from a small, private university by way of email submission. Participants were located in various states within the United States of America. Participants were selected via the Council of Social Work Education, a public directory of 233 accredited, Masters-level social work programs (Accreditation, 2015). Thus, participants were selected using convenience methods. It was not necessary to obtain consent from the organizations where the participants work due to the convenience sampling method. Informed consent was acquired from participants returning their Consent to Participate form, which included the electronic signatures of all participants.

Participants were employed as either part-time adjunct, full-time faculty, tenured track, or tenured faculty. Job titles varied between social work faculty, MSW department chair, program director, or field education director or coordinator. All the respondents were included in the

sample. Specific demographics such as gender, employment status, job title, and the learning environment in which participants taught was updated after the survey had been administered.

Survey Construct

The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was compiled of four sections, which were Demographics, Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures, Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices, and Perceptions and Practices of Gatekeeping. Statements in all four sections targeted responses that were useful to examine the differences between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices between online and traditional programs. These statements were also helpful to assess the relationship between MSW faculty perceptions and their practices of gatekeeping.

Section I consisted of 11 closed-ended statements. The statements were designed to obtain demographic information from participants. These statements provided generalized background information about participants. This information was helpful to examine this study's variables between online and traditional groups, as well as to establish generalizability of the results. In this section of the survey, statement numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were generated from the gatekeeping survey that was modified in this study (Tams, 2004). Statement numbers 2, 3, and 4, in Section I, were written verbatim from the adopted survey. Statement numbers 5 and 6, in Section I, were rephrased to meet the purpose of this study.

Section II consisted of 24 closed-ended, Likert scaled survey statements. Statements in this section were intended to help the researcher gain a better understanding of participants' thoughts, attitudes, and views toward gatekeeping procedures in their respective instructional program (online or traditional). In this section of the survey, item numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10,

and 13 were generated from the gatekeeping survey that was modified for the purpose of this study (Tams, 2004). Item numbers 1, 2, 6, and 8, in Section II, were written verbatim from the adopted survey. Item numbers 3, 5, 7, 10, and 13, in Section II, were rephrased to meet the purpose of this study.

Section III was compiled of statements aimed at assisting the researcher to better understand what the actual gatekeeping practices of participants were. This section consisted of 13 closed-ended, Likert scaled survey statements. In this section of the survey, item numbers 5 and 13 were generated from the gatekeeping survey that was modified for the purpose of this study (Tams, 2004). Item numbers 5 and 13, in Section III, were rephrased to meet the purpose of this study.

Section IV consisted of six open-ended, qualitative questions. Questions in this section were designed to gain a deeper understanding of participants' thoughts, attitudes, and views towards gatekeeping procedures beyond the Likert scaled survey questions.   These questions also aimed to better understand the past and present experiences of participants with gatekeeping practices. In this section of the survey, question number 1 was generated from the gatekeeping survey that was modified for the purpose of this study and was written verbatim (Tams, 2004). The qualitative questions aimed to support the quantitative questions and statements represented in this instrument.

The participant survey was sent via email. The email included the survey, an introduction letter from the researcher, as well as a Consent to Participate form that each participant was required to complete to participate in the study. Participants were offered an incentive for participation. The incentive was that all participant names were entered into a

random drawing that resulted in a first, second, and third place winner. Prizes for each place were retail store gift cards with the values of $25, $15, and $10, respectively.

Pilot Test

Face validity was established with the instrument through pilot testing. "A pilot test of a questionnaire or interview survey is a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback from a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate he instrument" (Creswell, 2012). The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was submitted to nine experts in the field of social work for pilot testing, hereafter referred to as pilot testers. The participants consisted of social work faculty, director of field education, department chair, and MSW director. Six of the nine potential participants identified completed the pilot test of the instrument.

The researcher piloted the instrument via email and included a letter attachment that provided the definition of gatekeeping, outlined the purpose of the study, and asked for feedback, including but not limited to the areas of readability, sensibility, and relevance of the instruments questions to the purpose of the study. Participants were assured that the information pertaining to this pilot study would be discussed only in the dissertation; neither the pilot tester's identity nor their institution affiliation would be revealed.

Based on participant feedback, key revisions to the pilot test included:

- providing a definition of gatekeeping in the survey;

- expounding on the word *culture* to include ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values;

- adding a category to types of institution attended to include *religious affiliation*;

- replacing the term *administration* to *department chair* or *program*

  director/coordinator to be more specific.

Two of the participants recommended that the terms *fieldwork* and *field instruction* be changed

to *work performance* for the purposes of making the results more generalizable; the researcher

complied with this recommendation throughout the survey. Statement number 23 in Section II-

Gatekeeping Procedures ("Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is not effective") was

removed, as it could be answered in statement number 22 of the same section ("Remediation

through gatekeeping procedures is effective").

Other minor re-wording changes were made to improve readability of the instrument to

include removing the term *gatekeeping* from the survey statements and replacing it with a

specific task. For example, statement 5 in Section III was changed from "I have recommended

student(s) for gatekeeping due to poor academic performance" to read "I have recommended

student(s) to the student review committee due to poor academic performance." The same

change to the term *gatekeeping* was made to statement 6 of Section III.

Response Results

The initial email sent to actual participants of the survey was intentionally sent on a

Monday morning, before 8am CST, October 19, 2015. The decision to send the survey before

the start of the workday was spearheaded by existing research, which suggested that survey

submission during this time has a higher response rate than electronic surveys sent midday

(Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). In an attempt to avoid sending numerous emails within a

small-time frame, as well as to prevent the survey from being overlooked, the researcher

followed up with reminder emails in weekly increments for four consecutive weeks (Dillman et al., 2014).

During the initial 4-week span of invitations to potential participants, three hybrid/online participants and 27 traditional participants responded. In an attempt to increase the reliability of the data received, as well as to reduce the limitation of having too few responses that represent the hybrid/online teaching environment, the researcher extended the invitation to the Bachelor of Social Work Directors, Inc. (BPD), comprised of BSW and MSW faculty, listserv on January 19, 2016. This extension resulted in an additional 17 responses from educators who teach in the traditional environment and 2 from hybrid/online educators, for the total of 44 traditional responses and 5 hybrid/online responses. On February 18, 2016, the researcher made a final attempt to increase the reliability of the data and extended the invitation to members of the Distance Education of Social Work listserv, of which two hybrid/online and three traditional educators responded. All respondents were included in the sample for a total of 54 participants, 47 traditional, and 7 hybrid/online.

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected from the Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey responses. The mixed methods survey consisted of quantitative and qualitative questions and was administered at one time. The survey was compiled of four sections and sought to gather data that were useful to examine the differences between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices between online and traditional programs. The survey also sought to obtain data that were assistive to assess the relationship between MSW faculty perceptions and their practice of gatekeeping.

The survey was administered using Google Forms. Participants' quantitative responses were collected in the Google Sheets before being transferred to Excel, and later analyzed using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a software package used for the purpose of statistical analysis. Creswell (2012) described coding as "the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 243).

In this study, the researcher sought to describe the data obtained from the qualitative responses included in this study's survey. The researcher used Creswell's (2012) *bottom-up* approach to code the data. This process consisted of first reading through the data to gain an overall sense of the survey responses (Creswell, 2012). After reading the data, the researcher then identified similar themes and coded the data based on the identified themes in both online and traditional settings (Creswell, 2012). A 6-month time frame was allotted between administration of the survey and the final collection of responses.

Table 1

Data Analysis Plan

Research Questions	Data Source	Type of Statistical Analysis	Specific Procedures Utilized
1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping procedures and those procedures of online MSW faculty?	The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey	Descriptive Inferential	Measures of Central Tendency T-test for independent samples
2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping practices and those practices of online MSW faculty?	The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey	Descriptive Inferential	Measures of Central Tendency T-test for independent samples
3. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?	The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey	Descriptive Inferential	Measures of Central Tendency Pearson's r
4. What is the relationship between online MSW faculty perception of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?	The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey	Descriptive Inferential	Measures of Central Tendency Pearson's r

Table 1 illustrates the data analysis plan utilized in this study. The source of data collection in this study was the Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. The researcher completed a descriptive analysis for all four research questions to separately describe

the data sets. Descriptive statistical procedures describe data without making inferences (Creswell, 2012). According to Creswell (2012), descriptive analysis is helpful to "summarize the overall trends or tendencies in your data, provide an understanding of how varied your scores might be, and provide insight into where one score stands in comparison with others" (p.183). The specific procedure utilized to descriptively analyze the data sets for all four research questions was measures of central tendency (i.e., mean, median, and mode). This statistical procedure was useful to describe participant responses to the survey instrument used in this study.

The researcher also utilized inferential analysis to compare the two groups represented in Research Questions 1 and 2, online and traditional MSW faculty. Inferential statistical analysis was utilized to assess for a correlation between the variables in Research Questions 3 and 4, MSW faculty perceptions and actual practice of gatekeeping procedures. Inferential statistical analysis is useful to compare groups, as well as to assess if differences are significant (Creswell, 2012).

With all four research questions, the researcher utilized the t-test for independent samples as inferential data analysis. The t-test for independent samples statistical test is commonly used in educational research and was helpful to compare online and traditional MSW faculty groups in this study. The statistical test was also used to compare demographics, perception of gatekeeping procedures, experiences of gatekeeping practices, and perceptions and practices of gatekeeping (Creswell, 2012). Following the analysis of the t-test for independent samples, the researcher utilized the Pearson's r correlation coefficient statistical test to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables in Research Questions 3 and 4.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Collegiate gatekeeping practice is the multifaceted responsibility of college and university faculty, administration, and/or admission departments to guard the gate of service providing professions. Such gatekeeping practices include screening students during the pre-admission process, denial of admittance into a particular program, systematic remediation methods, and termination from programs when students have demonstrated unsuitable behaviors and failed to improve through remediation (Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Grady, 2009; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Moore & Urwin, 1991). Essentially, gatekeeping protects and supports students, while safeguarding society as a whole from future encounters with unethical and unqualified service practitioners (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000). In this study, gatekeeping was operationally defined as the method by which social work faculty fulfill their professional responsibility to ethically examine student suitability during pre-admission into a MSW program, as well as ongoing until graduation (Miller & Koerin, 2001). Existing literature has defined student suitability as ethical and competent social work practice (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Currer & Atherton, 2008; Holloway, 2013; NASW, 2008; Sowbel, 2012).

Formal training and ethical monitoring of social workers, previously termed friendly visitors, began in 1897 in the traditional setting at New York School, currently named Columbia University (Glicken, 2011; Social Work History, 2015). Over the years, traditional social work education has advanced to include classes that require students both to attend traditional classes, as well as to participate in online classwork for their social work education (Wilke & Vinton, 2006). In 2002, the first MSW web-based/online program began (Wilke & Vinton, 2006).

A review of the literature revealed that prior studies have explored the pros and cons of the advancement of traditional learning environments to online programming; however, the perception of MSW social work faculty, as it relates to gatekeeping in traditional and the hybrid/online environment, appear to be nonexistent (Gilbert, 2014). The purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices in fully accredited, online and traditional Master's level social work programs. The researcher also sought to determine if there was a relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping responsibilities and their practice of gatekeeping procedures with MSW faculty in online and traditional programs.

The researcher completed a descriptive analysis of various demographic data sets to include gender, racial background, years of social work experience, history of gatekeeping training, current job title, and type of college/university in which participants were employed. For the purpose of descriptive analysis, the data were grouped by traditional versus. instructional method groups. Descriptive analysis is helpful to summarize data sets, identify trends, and to elaborate on comparisons within a study (Creswell, 2012). Measures of Central Tendency were used to descriptively analyze the data sets. This statistical procedure was valuable to describe participant responses to the survey instrument used in this study.

Following the descriptive analysis, for purposes of inferential analysis, the data were grouped by variable as well as traditional versus instructional method groups. The variables were:

1. MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures in traditional environments.

2. MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures in online environments.

3. MSW faculty experiences of gatekeeping practices in traditional environments.

4. MSW faculty experiences of gatekeeping practices in online environments.

The researcher also utilized inferential analysis to compare the two groups represented in Research Questions 1 and 2, online and traditional MSW faculty.

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of online MSW faculty?

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping practices and those of online MSW faculty?

Inferential statistical analysis was utilized to assess for a correlation between the variables in Research Questions 3 and 4, MSW Faculty Perception and actual practice of gatekeeping procedures.

1. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

2. What is the relationship between online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 published by IBM. The researcher utilized the *t*-test for independent samples as inferential data analysis with Research Questions 1 and 2. The *t*-test for independent samples was helpful to compare online and traditional MSW faculty groups in this study. The researcher utilized the Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient statistical test to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables in Research Questions 3 and 4.

Sample

The researcher conducted this study remotely from a small, private university by way of email submission. The source of data collection in this study was the Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Initial participants were selected via the Council of Social Work Education, a public directory of 233 accredited, Masters-level social work programs located in various states (Accreditation, 2015). Invitations to complete the survey were sent via emails for four consecutive weeks, on a Monday, beginning October 19, 2015. During the initial 4-week span of invitations to potential participants, three hybrid/online participants and 27 traditional participants responded. In an attempt to increase the reliability of the data received as well as to reduce the limitation of having too few responses representing the hybrid/online teaching environment, the researcher extended the invitation to the Bachelor of Social Work Directors, Inc. (BPD) listserv on January 19, 2016. This extension resulted in an additional 17 responses from educators who teach in the traditional environment and two from hybrid/online educators, for the total of 44 traditional responses and five hybrid/online responses. On February 18, 2016, the researcher made a final attempt to increase the reliability of the data and extended the invitation to members of the Distance Education of Social Work listserv, of which two hybrid/online and three traditional educators responded. All respondents were included in the sample for a total of fifty-four participants, forty-seven traditional and seven hybrid/online. The discrepancy in the number of responses by educators who primarily teaching in the traditional environment versus those who reported teaching in the hybrid/online environment was significant and is a limitation to the study. Specific demographics such as gender, racial background, years of experience as a social worker, history of gatekeeping training, current job

title, and type of university/college the participant was employed at are descriptively analyzed in

Table 2.

Table 2

Participants Demographics by Instructional Method

		Instructional Method	
	Gender	Traditional f (%)	Hybrid/Online f (%)
	Male	n=19 (86.4)	n=3 (13.6)
	Female	n=28 (87.5)	n=4 (12.5)
Racial Background		n=47	n=7
	Black or African American	6 (12.8)	1 (14.3)
	Asian, White or Caucasian	0	1 (14.3)
	American Indian or Native American	1 (2.1)	0
	White or Caucasian	36 (76.6)	3 (42.9)
	Latino	2 (4.3)	0
	White or Caucasian, Latino	0	1 (14.3)
	Prefer not to answer	2 (4.3)	1 (14.3)
Years of Experience as a Social Worker		n=47	n=7
	0-5	2 (4.3)	0
	6-10	4 (8.5)	0
	11-15	4 (8.5)	1 (14.3)
	16-20	6 (12.8)	3 (42.9)
	21 or more	31 (66)	3 (42.9)
Received Gatekeeping Training		n=47	n=7
	Yes	19 (40.4)	1 (14.3)
	No	28 (59.6)	6 (85.70)
Current Job Title		n=47	n=7
	Director/Coordinator of Field Education	4 (8.5)	0
	MSW Department Chair/Program Director	25 (53.2)	5 (71.4)
	Social Work Faculty	12 (25.5)	2 (28.6)
	MSW Department Chair/Program Director, Social Work Faculty	4 (8.5)	0
	Director/Coordinator of Field Education, Social Work Faculty	2 (4.3)	0
Type of College or University Employed		n=47	n=7

Public	32 (68.1)	5 (71.4)
Private	9 (19.1)	2 (28.6)
Religious Affiliated	4 (8.5)	0
Public, Private, Religious Affiliated	1 (2.1)	0
Private, Religious Affiliated	1 (2.1)	0

Note: Descriptive analysis was conducted using Measures of Central Tendency's to create Frequency tables.

Gender

Demographic data were analyzed to better understand the sample of participants using descriptive analysis (i.e., measures of central tendency). Participants were given the option of selecting male or female in the area of gender. Of the total of 54 participants, 22 males participated in the study, of which 19 (86.4%) of traditional responses, of the males reported teaching in the traditional environment and three (13.6%) reported primarily teaching in the hybrid/online environment. The remaining 32 participants reported being female. The female participant population was comprised of 28 (87.5%) who taught in the traditional environment and four (12.5%) reported that they primarily taught in the hybrid/online environment. There were more female participants in the study in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments than males.

Racial Background

With regard to the racial background of the sample participants, the largest group of participants in both traditional and online teaching environments reported being White or Caucasian; 36 (76.6% of traditional responses) taught in the traditional environment, and three (42.9%) of hybrid/online responses, taught in the hybrid/online environment. Seven of the participants were Black or African American. Six (12.8% of traditional responses) primarily provided instruction in the traditional environment and one (14.3% of hybrid/online responses)

reported primarily providing instruction in the hybrid/online environment. Black or African American participants were the second most represented racial group in this study. One, or 14.3%, of hybrid/online responses reported being Asian, White or Caucasian and that person reported primarily teaching in the hybrid/online environment. One, or 2.1% of traditional responses, reported being American Indian or Native American and primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment. Two, or 4.3% of hybrid/online responses, reported being Latino and primarily taught in the traditional instructional environment. One participant, or 14.3% of hybrid/online responses, primarily taught in the hybrid/online environment reported identifying as White or Caucasian Latino, as well as preferred not to answer. Two, or 4.3% of traditional responses, preferred not to answer.

Years of Experience as a Social Worker

The participants were asked to select the option that best represented the years of experience they held as a Social Worker. Thirty-four of the 54 participants reported having 21 or more years of experience; 31, 66% of traditional responses, and three, 42.9% of hybrid/online responses. The second highest group of responses reported having 16-20 years of experience as a Social Worker; six, 12.8% of traditional responses, and three, 42.9% of hybrid/online responses. In the traditional teaching environment, four, 8.5% of traditional responses, reported having 6-10 years and 11-15 years of experience as a Social Worker. Two, 4.3% of traditional responses, reported holding five years or less of teaching experience in the teaching environment and one, 14.3% of hybrid/online responses, reported having 11-15 years of experience as a Social Worker.

Received Gatekeeping Training

When inquiring about gatekeeping experience that participants had received, 34 of all respondents reported that they had not received gatekeeping training. Twenty-eight of those respondents, 59.6% of traditional responses, reported primarily teaching in the traditional environment; and six, 85.70% of hybrid/online responses, reported that they taught in the hybrid/online environment. Twenty of all respondents reported having received gatekeeping training prior to completing the survey; 19, or 40.4% of traditional responses, reported teaching in the traditional environment; and one, 14.3% of hybrid/online responses, reported teaching in the hybrid/online environment.

Current Job Title

The researcher in this study sought the participation of all social work faculty and administration. In the traditional teaching environment, four, 8.5% of traditional responses, were the Director/Coordinator of Field Education; 25, or 53.2% of traditional responses, were MSW Department Chair/Program Directors; four, 8.5% of traditional responses, were MSW Department Chair/Program Director and Social Work Faculty; and two, 4.3% of traditional responses, reported being the Director/Coordinator of Field Education, Social Work Faculty. In the traditional teaching environment, MSW Department Chair/Program Director represented the largest group of participants. The second most represented group of respondents who primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment was Social Work faculty. Persons holding the dual role of Director/Coordinator of Field Education and Social Work Faculty were least represented in the study. MSW Department Chair/Program Director was the most represented job title represented in the online teaching environment, by five, or 71.4% of online response;

and Social Worker faculty, two, or 28.6% of online responses, represented the fewest job title respondents in the online environment.

Type of College or University Employed

The largest number of respondents to the survey reported working in a public university or college. Thirty-two, or 68.1% of traditional responses, reported primarily teaching in the traditional environment and five, or 71.4% of hybrid/online responses, reported primarily teaching in the hybrid/online environment. The second most represented employment location was private school with nine (19.1% of traditional responses) who reported primarily teaching in the traditional environment and two (28.6% of hybrid/online responses) who reported primarily teaching in the hybrid/online environment. Four, or 8.5% of traditional responses, reported being employed at a religiously affiliated college or university, but did not designate if the organization was private or public. In the public and religious-affiliated, as well as the private, religious-affiliated, one (2.1% of traditional responses) reported primarily teaching in the traditional teaching environment. When analyzing the data using the type of college or university employed as an independent variable, the discrepancy in the number of responses was a limitation.

Cronbach Alpha

The researcher adopted and modified Tam's (2004) existing gatekeeping survey to develop a quantitative, 35 item questionnaire, with a qualitative component. The researcher aimed to measure MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures as well as their experience with gatekeeping practices in both traditional and online instructional environments. The quantitative questions were comprised of 5-point, Likert-type scale items that ranked from

"1-strongly disagree" to "5-strongly agree". Fifty-four participants completed the survey. Prior to analyzing the research questions, the researcher conducted a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to test the internal consistency of The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey to assess the reliability of the instrument's measurement of MSW social work faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and MSW faculty experiences of gatekeeping practices (see Table 3).

Table 3

The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey Reliability Statistics

The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.709	.727	25

Yockey (2008), described reliability as the consistency or high probability that a measure will produce similar scores in subsequent administrations. Cronbach's Alpha or coefficient alpha scores generally fall between the range of .00 to 1.0 (Yockey, 2008). Values closer to 1.0 indicate increased internal consistency that a measure is measuring what it intends to measure as well as that the results will be reliable (Yockey, 2008). Cronbach's Alpha values are commonly resolved as follows: ">/=.90 is excellent, .80-.89 is good, .70-.79 is fair, .60-.69 is marginal, and <=.59 is poor" (Yockey, 2008, p. 50).

The initial Cronbach's Alpha for all 35 items on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was .484. Such a low Cronbach α value is considered poor and substantiates cause for further investigation of the data set. Given further examination of the data set, the statistics proposed that the instrument's reliability could increase by omitting

various questions. The following questions or items were omitted for the purpose of increasing

Cronbach's Alpha's value and ultimately the reliability and internal consistency of the

instrument (see Table 4).

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Omitted Items

Omitted Items	
Variable: Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures	Variable: Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices
If a student's work performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of aptitude" for social work more strongly than "lack of experience".	My college/university includes standardized test scores as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
If a student's work performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of experience" for social work" more strongly than "lack of aptitude".	I have given passing grades to students who did not earn them.
Fear of litigation is the major reason that prevents me from giving a fail grade to a student.	I consider culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs/experiences, and values) of a student before implementing or recommending gatekeeping procedures.
The Department Chair needs to provide more training to instructors and faculty regarding student suitability for the social work profession.	
The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the field director with MSW students.	
Gatekeeping should differ between online and traditional MSW Programs.	
My personal culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) contribute to the view(s) I have towards gatekeeping.	

After removing these 10 items, the final measure improved the Cronbach's α to .709, as shown

above in Table 3, which greatly increased the reliability value from poor to fair indicating that

the internal consistency of the instrument is acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Cronbach's Alpha Variables

The instrument used in this study, The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice

Survey, measured two primary variables, MSW Faculty's Experiences with Gatekeeping

Practices and MSW Faculty's Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures, in two different

instructional settings, traditional and online. Twelve of the 35 quantitative questions sought the

measure the variable MSW Faculty's Experiences with Gatekeeping Practices and the remaining

25 Likert type scale questions were used to measure the variable MSW faculty's Perception of

Gatekeeping Procedures. The researcher conducted a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reliability

calculation to assess the internal consistency of each of the two primary variables.

Table 5

Variable: Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures Reliability Statistics

Variable: Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.537	.577	16

The Cronbach's Alpha for 16 of the 25 items, post omission, on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey scale, measuring MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping procedures was .537 (see Table 5). A Cronbach's α of .537 is adequate with a poor or weak reliability. No further re-analysis or omission was undertaken to this variable. All 54 participant responses were included in the analysis of this variable.

Table 6

Variable: Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices Reliability Statistics

Variable: Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.692	.708	9

The Cronbach's Alpha for nine of the 25 items, post-omission, on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey scale, measuring MSW faculty experiences of gatekeeping practices was .692 (see Table 6). A Cronbach's α of .692 is adequate with marginal internal consistency reliability. No further re-analysis or omission was undertaken to this variable. All 24 participants' responses were included in the analysis of this variable.

Results

The subsequent inferential analysis utilized the 25-item, post-omission, scale to examine

the study's research questions, to test their null hypothesis, to compare responses from traditional

faculty with online faculty in questions one and two, as well as to assess for a correlation

between variables in questions three and four, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping

procedures and MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices. The following questions

were used to answer Research Question 1 (Table 7).

Table 7

Quantitative Survey Items for Research Question 1

Label	Survey item
PrcptnGKproc1	I am able to devote the time required to document failing performance.
PrcptnGKproc2	I am willing to confront a student's poor work at the risk of alienating the student.
PrcptnGKproc5	I would fail a student even if my department chair or program director did not support it.
PrcptnGKproc6	I would pursue all avenues to prevent a student who is performing inadequately in the field education from being advanced to ultimately enter the profession.
PrcptnGKproc7	I am willing to risk examination of my professional judgements in order to assert my right to fail an inadequate student.
PrcptnGKproc10	Existing policy for failing a student for unsatisfactory work performance is well written in the social work student manual.
PrcptnGKproc11	My professional judgement regarding student's performance is well respected by the Department Chair and/or the MSW Program Director.
PrcptnGKproc12	Gatekeeping should take place prior to students being admitted in the program.
PrcptnGKproc13	Gatekeeping is an ongoing process (i.e. starts at pre-admissions and continues until the student graduates).
PrcptnGKproc14	I am clear about my role/duty in gatekeeping.
PrcptnGKproc15	I am responsible for evaluating student fit for the profession.
PrcptnGKproc17	The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to social work faculty with MSW students.
PrcptnGKproc18	The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the university's admissions department with MSW students.

PrcptnGKproc19	The responsibility of gatekeeping is a collective responsibility (i.e. the university's admissions, social work faculty, and the field director) with MSW students.
PrcptnGKproc20	Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is effective.
PrcptnGKproc23	Faculty should consider the culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) of a student when considering gatekeeping procedures to address concerns with student suitability.

Research Question 1: What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those procedures of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

Research Question 1 examined "What were the differences between traditional MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping procedures and those procedures of hybrid/online MSW faculty?" The researcher proposed a null hypothesis: "There was no difference between traditional MSW faculty and online MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping procedures." The source of data collection to answer this question was The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Specifically, 16 of the 25 quantitative questions were used to measure participants' perception of gatekeeping procedures as well as five of the eight qualitative questions were helpful to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping procedures. The survey was administered and data were collected between October 19, 2015 and January 19, 2016. Fifty-four participants completed the survey and all of their responses were included in the data analysis process for Research Question 1.

The researcher used SPSS version 23 published by IBM to analyze the quantitative data for Research Question 1. The researcher utilized the *t*-test for independent samples as inferential data analysis to compare both traditional and hybrid/online MSW faculty within the variables,

perception of gatekeeping procedures and experiences of gatekeeping practices, as well as to test

the null hypothesis for Research Question 1.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures in Traditional and Hybrid/Online Teaching Environments Independent-samples t-Test

Group Statistics					
	Primary Teaching Environment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures	Traditional (face-to-face)	47	4.0293	.33754	.04924
	Hybrid/Online	7	3.9286	.32361	.12231

The researcher conducted an independent-samples *t*-test analysis. Group statistics

indicated, as shown in Table 8, that 47 respondents who primarily teach in the traditional/face-to-

face environment had a mean of 4.0293, standard deviation (SD) of .33754, and standard error

mean (SE) of .04924. Given the instrument's Likert-type scale response options of 1-strongly

disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree, the mean indicated that MSW

faculty who primarily taught in the traditional/face-to-face environment agreed with most of the

questions measuring the variable perception of gatekeeping procedures. Seven participants who

primarily taught in the online environment had a mean of 3.9286 (SD .32361, SE .12231). In

rounding 3.9 up to 4.0, the mean indicated that MSW faculty who primarily taught in the online

environment responded between neutral and agree, agreeing on most answers.

Table 9

Comparison of Means for Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures in Traditional and Online Teaching Environments Independent-Sample t-Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
	f	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		
Equal variances assumed	.053	.820	.740	52	.463	.10068	.1361	-.17244	.37381

Note: Sig. (2-tailed) represents no significant difference at the p > .05 level. Also, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Sig. represents p level of no significant difference at the p > .05 level (George & Mallery, 2011).

An independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare perception of gatekeeping procedures scores for MSW traditional/face-to-face and hybrid/online MSW faculty. There was not a significant difference in the scores for MSW faculty who primarily taught in traditional/face-to-face environments (M=4.03, SD=.34) and MSW faculty who primarily taught in hybrid/online environments (M=3.93, SD=.32) environments; t (52) =.74, p = .463. The Levene's test for equality of variances indicated equal variances assumed for MSW traditional/face-to-face and MSW faculty do not significantly differ from each other at the p = .820. This statistical analysis indicated there was minimal difference in gatekeeping procedures in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments. Therefore, based on the inferential data analysis of Research Question 1, gatekeeping procedures are relatively similar

for MSW faculty in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments. Furthermore, the

null hypothesis, "There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and

hybrid/online faculty's perception of gatekeeping procedure," was accepted (Table 9).

In seeking a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping procedures,

the following qualitative questions were included in The Social Work Faculty's Perception and

Practice Survey and were helpful to expound on Research Question 1 (Table 10).

Table 10

Quantitative Survey Items Measuring Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures for Research Question 1

Label	Survey item
Qual1	How do you define gatekeeping in social work?
Qual4	What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices?
Qual6	What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education?
Qual7	What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping?
Qual8	What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping procedures?

The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was completed by participants

at one time. The survey was structured in a manner where participants completed the

quantitative questions first, followed by open-ended qualitative questions. When coding

common themes among the data, it was noticed that some questions were skipped resulting in no

assigning of a given response to the identified common theme. Everyone was given the option

of answering or skipping any of the questions. The remainder of this section will report the

common themes along with the amount of agreement among participants, relative to their

primary working environment, traditional and online (Table 11).

Table 11

Qual 1: How Do You Define Gatekeeping in Social Work?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
Determining Suitability through screening in and throughout the program	31	4
Protection of future clients	6	3
Ensuring that graduates practice competently	6	

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The first qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice

Survey, labeled Qual1, "How do you define gatekeeping in social work?" sought to better

understand how faculty in traditional teaching environments as well as faculty in hybrid/online

teaching environments defined gatekeeping in social work. Table 11 lists the identified common

themes associated to participant responses to this question. The number one response among

both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments was, "Determining suitability through

screening in and throughout the program." As shown in Table 11, 31 of participants who taught

in the traditional teaching environment and four of the responding participants who primarily

taught in the online teaching environment provided responses themed as determining suitability

through screening potential students into the social work profession and/or screening MSW

students for suitability throughout the time they are enrolled in a social work program.

Frequently stated comments were, "suitability and identification with the profession," "on-going assessment for 'fit' within the profession of social work, and acceptable level of performance within the MSW program," "professional obligation to screen out students from the SW profession who are unfit or unqualified for the profession," "monitoring suitability for the profession and counseling out students who are not appropriate," and "the responsibility of those in the profession (faculty, field supervisors, etc.) to educate and promote qualified students into the profession of social work."

The second common theme provided by faculty in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments was "Protection of future clients." Six participants who primarily taught in traditional learning environments selected this response and three faculty members who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environments reported this themed response. Frequent responding statements included "The set of rules and processes that protect the future clients of social workers by being selective on who enters the profession," "keeping our clients safe from harm," and "protecting the well-being of clients or communities the student may serve".

The third common theme provided by faculty who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment selected the theme, "Ensuring that graduates practice competently." Frequent responding statements included, "ensuring that students have the necessary academic and professional skills to be a social worker," "a student that possesses the knowledge, values, and skills to be an effective social worker," "limiting access to the profession for those not qualified either academically, emotionally, or professionally," and "assuring that the student is capable of providing social work services in a competent manner." Only seven participants in

the hybrid/online learning environment responded to this question, therefore there was not a third

common theme for the hybrid/online learning environment.

Table 12

Qual 4: What Barriers Exists that May Keep You From Implementing Gatekeeping Practices?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
University's push for enrollment	6	1
No barriers exist	12	
Vagueness of policy		2
Lack of support from administration and other university departments		1
University/Department resistance to dismiss students and push to ensure graduation	5	1
Fear of litigation or conflict with administrators		2
Compassion		1

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The fourth qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice

Survey, labeled Qual4, "What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping

practices?" was used to better understand faculty's perception regarding barriers that exist that

prevent them from executing gatekeeping practices. Table 12 lists the identified common themes

associated with participant responses to this question. Twelve respondents who primarily taught

in the traditional learning environment stated that there were not any barriers that prevent them

from executing gatekeeping practices. Six participants who primarily taught in the traditional

learning environment and one faculty member who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning

environment identified their university's push to increase and/or maintain enrollment as a barrier

to implementing gatekeeping practices. Frequently stated comments were "the push for enrollment by the university," "pressure to increase numbers in the social work program," and "demands for admission." The third highest represented common theme selected by participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment was "University/Department resistance to dismiss students and push to ensure graduation." Frequently stated comments were "multiple pressure to admit and pass students-financial (tuition revenue), time peer pressure," "university tends to support students completing degrees once they are admitted to the university," and "university push to admit and graduate students."

With regard to faculty responses from participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environments, vagueness of policy and fear of litigation or conflict with administrators were each stated twice; hence these were equal number one barriers to implementing gatekeeping practices. Specific statements included: "our policies lack sufficient detail in clarity," "unclear suitability criteria that may lead to discrimination," "fear of litigation," and "students whose parents have a significant relationship with the college such as donors, trustee grandchildren. Also, students who have resources to hire an attorney to advocate for them." Lack of support from administration and other university departments along with compassion are the remaining third ranked themes selected as barriers to implementing gatekeeping practices. Participants described the "lack of support from grad school, Office of Equity and Diversity, or University Counsel" and faculty perceptions that "some students can be very complaint as a student; [you] have to have time/access to get to know them beyond a superficial level."

Table 13

Qual 6: What Can Be Done to Strengthen Existing Gatekeeping Mechanisms for Social Work

Field Education?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
Provide practical training on gatekeeping	6	2
Develop clear policies	11	
Support from administration	4	
Interview applicants	4	
Unsure	4	1
Remediate immediately		1
Research		1
Hold students and staff accountable	4	

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The sixth qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey, labeled Qual6, "What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work education?" was used to better understand faculty perceptions of what can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education. Table 13 lists the identified common themes associated to participant responses to this question. The highest represented common theme, among faculty who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment was "Develop clear policies." Statements involving the development of clear policies included: "clear policies, measurable expectations, and support from all levels of the institution for following through in sometimes challenging ways for students;" "ethical, effective policies that provide faculty, students and administrators with clear expectations and guidelines,

and then make sure they are followed;" and "setting a clearer standard for what constitutes impairment."

The second highest ranked common theme associated with Qual6, representing six responses of faculty who primarily teach in the traditional learning environment and two who primarily teach in the hybrid/online learning environment was "Provide practical training on gatekeeping." Respondent statements included: "more training for field instructors;" "more training for field instructors and agency staff;" "more training and education would be better;" and simply "training." Three common themes, ranking as the third highest stated theme, were reported among faculty who primarily taught on the traditional learning environment as possible methods of strengthening exiting gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education, "Support from administration," "interview applicants," and "hold students and staff accountable." In addition, four participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment stated that they were unsure what could be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education. Specific perceptions included "reduce the pressure to enroll record number of student. Cap programs;" "Faculty must be allowed to have input into the process;" "support the field director, staff, and instructors in their assessments of students;" "documentation and interview;" "interview applicants;" "start EARLY from the first classroom experience – Don't wait and allow behaviors to build up so that they have been uncorrected until they get to the field;" and "hold the student and faculty members accountable!"

"Remediate immediately" and "Research" are both themes that were stated one time

each, thus the second-highest identified theme by faculty who primarily teach in the

hybrid/online learning environment.

Table 14

Qual 7: What Role Does Culture (Ethnic and Racial Customs, Practices, Beliefs, Experiences, and Values) Hold with Regard to Your View of gatekeeping?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
No role (student's s/b culturally aware)	7	
Very little	6	
Should be culturally sensitive	26	5

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The seventh qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice

Survey, labeled Qual7 "What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs,

experiences, and values) hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping?" was used to better

understand the role culture hold with regard to faculty's view of gatekeeping. Table 14 lists the

identified common themes associated with participant responses to this question. There was

minimal variation between participant responses to this question, especially for the hybrid/online

teaching environment. The highest represented common theme, in both teaching environments

was "should be culturally sensitive," which was stated 26 times by faculty in the traditional

learning environment and five times in the hybrid/online learning environment. This theme was

the only theme expressing the perception of faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online

learning environment. Examples of specific comments included: "I think it is very important to

be sensitive to culture when considering gate keeping;" "Cultural awareness is a critical aspect of any process including understanding the views and perspectives of individuals enrolling in a social work program;" "Culture MUST be considered when assessing student development;" and "It is part of the total assessment."

The second ranking common theme, with seven comments was "No role (students should be culturally aware)." Comments that support the perception that culture does not have a role in implementing gatekeeping include: "None. I believe each student should understand their own personal values and culture and balance them in professional practice situations;" "My culture/ethnicity does not impact my gatekeeping position;" "I don't see them as related;" and "None! If there are deficits because of culture, then deal with them before getting in."

Six comments identified with the third ranked common theme, "Very little." Comments included "It should not have a major role;" "very little;" "It's a lesser concern. The minimum standards for social work practice do not change because of cultural factors."

Table 15

Qual 8: What Role Does Culture (Ethnic and Racial Customs, Practices, Beliefs, Experiences, and Values) Hold with Regard to your Willingness to Implement or Partake in Gatekeeping Procedures?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
No role	17	2
Should be culturally sensitive	12	1
Very little	3	1

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The eighth qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey, labeled Qual8 "What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping procedures?" was used to better understand how culture affects one's willingness to independently or collaboratively participate in gatekeeping practices. Table 15 lists the identified common themes associated with participant responses to this question. The highest ranked common theme for both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments was, "No role," indicating that 17 participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and two participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment did not perceive culture to hold any role when implementing gatekeeping practices.

Twelve participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment reported that faculty "should be culturally sensitive" when implementing gatekeeping practices. Frequent responses included: "Primarily in how to handle the conversations and possible practices, depending upon someone's racial or cultural background;" "it has to be considered;" I think it is very important to be sensitive to culture when considering gatekeeping;" "Culture, like all factors, has a role in any interpersonal process;" "Diversity is very important but that doesn't mean one strays from the values and ethics."

The third ranked common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments was "Very little," expressed through statements that, "Little. Expectations need to be the same since mastery of the outcome variables should be demonstrated by all;" "I think all of our faculty are 'rooting' for underrepresented

folks, but we don't lower our expectations;" and "Because of bias, I try to give every student the benefit of the doubt and a chance to appeal decisions related to dismissal. I also try very hard to stick to procedure but I am sure bias creeps in at times;" and "very little; safety of the client is paramount on our gatekeeping procedures so that is the focus of actions."

Research Question 2: What are the Differences between Traditional MSW Faculty Perception of Gatekeeping Practices and those Practices of Hybrid/online MSW Faculty?

Research question 2 examined "What were the differences between traditional MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping practices and the practices of hybrid/online MSW faculty?" The researcher proposed a null hypothesis, "There was no difference between traditional MSW faculty's and hybrid/online faculty's experience with gatekeeping practices." The source of data collection to answer this question was The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Specifically, nine of the 25 quantitative questions were used to measure participants' perceptions of gatekeeping practices. In addition, three of the eight qualitative questions were helpful to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perception of faculty's gatekeeping practices. The survey was administered and data were collected between October 19, 2015 and January 19, 2016. Fifty-four participants completed the survey and all of their responses were included in the data analysis process for Research Question 2. The following questions were used to answer Research Question 2.

Table 16

Quantitative Survey Items for Research Question 2

Label	Survey item
GKprac2	My college/university includes telephone or in-person interviews as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
GKprac3	My college/university includes writing samples as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
GKprac4	The lack of measurable practice standards in social work does not deter me from failing a student due to poor performance.
GKprac5	I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to poor academic performance.
GKprac6	I am an active participant on the student review committee at my college/university.
GKprac7	I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
GKprac8	I have recommended a student to receive remediation through gatekeeping procedures due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
GKprac10	I have failed students when other teachers would not.
GKprac11	I generally practice gatekeeping procedures regardless of a student's emotional status.

The researcher used SPSS version 23 published by IBM to analyze the data for Research

Question 2. The researcher utilized the *t*-test for independent samples as inferential data analysis

to compare both traditional and hybrid/online MSW faculty within the variables, MSW faculty

perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices,

and also to test the null hypothesis in Research Question 2.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Perception of Experiences in Gatekeeping Practices in Traditional and Hybrid/Online Primary Teaching Environments Independent samples t-test

Group Statistics					
Primary Teaching Environment		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception of Experiences in Gatekeeping Practices	Traditional (face-to-face)	47	3.69050	.71088	.10369
	Hybrid/Online	7	3.9524	.33245	.12565

The researcher conducted an independent-samples *t*-test analysis and the group statistics indicated, as shown in Table 17, that 47 respondents who primarily teach in the traditional/face-to-face environment had a mean score of 3.69050 when completing the survey, a standard deviation of .71088, and a standard error mean of .10369. Given the instrument's response options of 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree, on the Likert-type scale, the mean indicated that MSW faculty who primarily taught in the traditional/face-to-face environment selected neutral when answering most of the questions measuring the variable perception of gatekeeping procedures. Seven participants who primary taught in the hybrid/online environment had a mean of 3.9524, a standard deviation of .33245, and a standard error of mean .12565. In rounding 3.9 up to 4.0, the mean indicated that MSW faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online environment responded between neutral and agree and agreed on most answers.

Table 18

Comparison of Means for Perception of Experiences in Gatekeeping Practices in Traditional and Hybrid/Online Primary Teaching Environments Independent t-test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence of the Difference | |
								Lower	Upper
	f	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		
Equal variances assumed	3.071	.086	-.937	52	.353	-.25735	.27471	.80860	.29391

Note: Sig. (2-tailed) represents no significant difference at the p > .05 level. Also, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Sig. represents p level of no significant difference at the p > .05 level (George & Mallery, 2011).

An independent-samples *t*-test was utilized to compare perception of gatekeeping practices scores for MSW traditional/face-to-face and hybrid/online MSW faculty. There was not a significant difference in the scores for MSW faculty who primarily taught in traditional/face-to-face environments (M = 3.69, SD = .71) and MSW faculty who primarily taught in hybrid/online environments (M = 3.95, SD = .33) environments; *t* (52) =-.94, *p* = .353. The Levene's test for Equality of Variances indicated that, equal variances assumed, for MSW traditional/face-to-face and hybrid/online MSW faculty do not significantly differ from each other at the p = .086. This statistical analysis indicates there was minimal difference between MSW faculty perceptions of experiences with gatekeeping practices in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments. Therefore, based on the data analysis of Research

Question 2, experiences with gatekeeping practices are relatively similar for MSW faculty in both traditional and hybrid/online teaching environments. Furthermore, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty's and hybrid/online MSW faculty's experiences with gatekeeping practices," was accepted.

In seek of a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping practices, the following qualitative questions were included in The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey and were helpful to expound on Research Question 2.

Table 19

Quantitative Survey Items Measuring Perception of Gatekeeping Practices for Research Question 1

Label	Survey item
Qual2	What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming?
Qual3	What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to assess student suitability?
Qual5	How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effectiveness?

The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was completed by participants at one time. The survey was structured in a manner where participants completed the quantitative questions first, followed by open-ended qualitative questions. When coding common themes among the data, it was noticed that some questions were skipped resulting in no assigning of a given response to the identified common theme. Everyone was given the option of answering or skipping any of the questions. The remainder of this section will report the common themes

along with the amount of agreement among participants, relative to their primary working

environment, traditional and online.

Table 20

Qual2: What Criteria Do You Use to Define Professional Suitability for MSW Level Programming?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
Field practicum evaluation and academic assessment measurements	9	
Professional Behavior – ethical	21	4
Academic skills	7	1
Desire to grow with reception to feedback		1

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The second qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice

Survey, labeled Qual2 "What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level

programming" was used to better understand what criteria or measures participants actively use

to determine that a student is exhibiting professional suitability for the MSW level programs.

Table 20 lists the identified common themes associated to participant responses to this question.

The most frequent common theme reported by participants, in both traditional and online

learning environments, as criteria used to define professional suitability for MSW level

programming was, "Professional Behavior-ethical." Comments identifying with this theme were

repeated 21 times by participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment

and four times by participants who primarily taught in hybrid/online teaching environments.

Participants described criteria as: "We look at 'dispositions' as defined in education. In field, the

student must follow employer's rules e.g., confidentiality etc.;" "Ethical behavior-integrity, passion rational judgment/critical thinking skills;" "Is the student able to meet the ethical obligations of integrity and competence?;" and "ability to meet EPAS competencies and field requirements."

The common theme, "Field practicum evaluation and academic assessment" was identified by participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment as the theme with the second highest amount of agreement. Responses that identified with the aforementioned theme were stated nine times. Frequent comments included: "Communication, knowledge, and skills as measured by field experience instrument;" "adequate/strong written and oral communication skills;" "academic and field experience;" and "We have standards for academic and professional performance, which is a 32-item assessment." Participants who primarily taught in hybrid/online learning environments provided responses, which identified with the common themes: "Academic skills;" and "Desire to grow with reception to feedback;" once for each theme. Therefore, both aforementioned themes were considered the second top reported themes based on amount of agreement.

Seven participants, consequently the third top identified theme, provided responses which identified with the common theme of "Academic skills." Supporting statements included: "academic ability," "academic performance," "classroom grades," "grade point average;" and "writing, oral and written communication".

Table 21

Qual 3: What Steps, In Addition to those Already Established by Your College/University, Do You Take to Assess Student Suitability?

	Amount of Agreement	
Common Themes	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
Student performance		1
Classroom observation followed by faculty collaboration	6	2
No additional steps/only follows policy	11	1
Establish rapport with students	5	

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The third qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey, labeled Qual3 "What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to assess student suitability?" was designed to better understand if participants go beyond criteria established by their university to assess student suitability and if they do, what those steps are. Table 21 lists the identified common themes associated with participant responses to this question. The top common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment and one of the second top common themes identified by participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment was "No additional steps/only follows policy." Some participants specifically stated, "I only follow our policy" or "None. Our process is pretty comprehensive; most participants simply replied, "none," listing established criteria such as GPA requirements and writing samples. Eleven participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one

participant who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment provided responses that identified with the aforementioned common theme.

The second most identified common theme among participants who primarily taught in the traditional environment, and top identified common theme among participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment was, "Classroom observation followed by faculty collaboration." Supporting responses included, "Observations, discussion/interactions;" "We have a retention committee;" "Feedback…from field instructors and field liaisons;" "values exercises in practice classes;" "We rely on MSW faculty to share any concerns from their course contact with students as well as advisor's perceptions;" and "seeing how students respond to tasks within our classes." Six participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and two participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment provided responses that identified with the aforementioned common theme.

The third top common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment was "Establish rapport with students." Five participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment provided responses that identified with this common theme. Frequent comments aligning with this common theme included: "Individual meetings with student to develop corrective action plan;" "Meet with student privately;" and "Spend time with student."

Table 22

Qual 5: How Does Your MSW Program Relate Gatekeeping and Program Effectiveness?

Common Themes	Amount of Agreement	
	Traditional	Hybrid/Online
Unsure	7	1
Closely related/When gatekeeping is implemented it infers program effectiveness	12	2
Program does not relate the two	5	1

Note: Amount of agreement was determined through coding common themes and tallying the number of responses for each common theme. The amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. Only the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, are reported.

The fifth qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey, labeled Qual5 "How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effectiveness?" was used to better understand if participants' MSW programs perceived there to be a relationship between gatekeeping and program effectiveness and if so, how their program relates the two aspects. Table 22 lists the identified common themes associated with participants' responses to this question.

The top common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment and participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment was "Closely related/When gatekeeping is implemented it infers program effectiveness." Twelve participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and two participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment provided responses that identified with this common theme. Frequent comments aligning with this common theme included: "Gatekeeping is part of our responsibility. Appropriate gatekeeping is a sign of effectiveness;" Both relate in assessing the effectiveness of the program;" "The two

concepts are absolutely intertwined;" and "Program effectiveness flows from appropriate gatekeeping."

The second top identified common theme among participants who primarily taught in the traditional environment, and one of two second top identified common themes among participants who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environment was "Unsure." Seven participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one participant who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment provided responses that identified with this common theme. All responses identifying with this common theme stated that they were not sure how their program related gatekeeping and program effectiveness.

The third top common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in the traditional teaching environment was "Program does not relate the two." Five participants who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment and one participant who primarily taught in the hybrid/online teaching environment provided responses that identified with this common theme. Frequent comments aligning with this common theme included: "Not very closely;" "No relationship;" and "I'm not sure it does."

Research Question 3: What is the Relationship between Traditional MSW Faculty Perceptions of Gatekeeping and their Practice of Gatekeeping?

The source of data collection to answer this question was The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. The survey was administered and data were collected between October 19, 2015 and January 19, 2016. Fifty-four participants completed the survey and all of their responses were included in the data analysis process for Research Question 3.

The researcher used SPSS version 23 published by IBM to analyze the data for Research Question 3. The researcher employed a Pearson r correlation coefficient test to measure and test the relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment. According to Pallant (2010), "Correlation analysis is used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables" (p. 128). Coefficient values, represented as r, indicate positive or negative correlation with either a -1, representing negative correlation, or +1, indicative of positive correlation between variables (Pallant, 2010). According to Cohen's guidelines for measuring effect or strength of a relationship, "r of $\pm$ .1, $\pm$ .3, and $\pm$ .5 as corresponding to small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively" (Yockey, 2008, p. 161). The Pearson r was also helpful to test the null hypothesis, which hypothesized that there was no relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping in the traditional teaching environment. All of the post-Cronbach's α survey items were included in this analysis for Research Questions 3 and 4.

Table 23

Post-Cronbach's α Survey Items

Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures	Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices
1) I am able to devote the time required to document failing performance.	1) My college/university includes telephone or in-person interviews as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
2) I am willing to confront a student's poor work at the risk of alienating the student.	2) My college/university includes writing samples as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
3) I would fail a student even if my department chair or program director did not support it.	3) The lack of measureable practice standards in social work does not deter me from failing a student due to poor performance.
4) I would pursue all avenues to prevent a student who is performing inadequately in the field education from being advanced to ultimately enter the profession.	4) I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to poor academic performance.
5) I am willing to risk examination of my professional judgements in order to assert my right to fail an inadequate student.	6) I am an active participant on the student review committee at my college/university.
7) Existing policy for failing a student for unsatisfactory work performance is well written in the social work student manual.	8) I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
9) My professional judgement regarding student's performance is well respected by the Department Chair and/or the MSW Program Director.	10) I have recommended a student to receive remediation through gatekeeping procedures due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
11) Gatekeeping should take place prior to students being admitted in the program.	12) I have failed students when other teachers would not.
13) Gatekeeping is an ongoing process (i.e. starts at pre-admissions and continues until the student graduates).	14) I generally practice gatekeeping procedures regardless of a student's emotional status.
15) I am clear about my role/duty in gatekeeping.	
16) I am responsible for evaluating student fit for the profession.	

17) The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to social work faculty with MSW students.
18) The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the university's admissions department with MSW students.
19) The responsibility of gatekeeping is a collective responsibility (i.e. the university's admissions, social work faculty, and the field director) with MSW students.
20) Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is effective.
21) Faculty should consider the culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) of a student when considering gatekeeping procedures to address concerns with student suitability.

Table 24

Primary Teaching Environment = Traditional/Face-to-Face Pearson r Correlation Coefficient statistical test

	Correlations	Perception of Experience with Gatekeeping Practices	Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures
Perception of Experience with Gatekeeping Practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	47	47
Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures	Pearson Correlation	.378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	47	47

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

   The relationship between MSW faculty's perceptions of experience with gatekeeping

practices and their perception of gatekeeping procedures in the traditional teaching environment

was examined using Pearson *r* correlation coefficient. N=47, indicates the number of participants included in the data analysis of Research Question 3. There was a medium/moderate, positive relationship, r = .378, between the two examined variables, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW experience with gatekeeping practices. There was a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping, p = .009 at the p < 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment," was rejected. The alternative hypothesis, "There was a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment," was accepted.

Research Question 4: What is the Relationship between Hybrid/Online MSW Faculty Perception of Gatekeeping and their Practice of Gatekeeping?

The source of data collection to answer this question was The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. The survey was administered and data were collected between October 19, 2015 and January 19, 2016. Fifty-four participants completed the survey and all of their responses were included in the data analysis process for Research Question 4.

The researcher used SPSS version 23 published by IBM to analyze the data for Research Question 4. The researcher employed a Pearson *r* correlation coefficient test to measure and test the relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW gatekeeping practices in the hybrid/online teaching environment. According to Pallant (2010), "Correlation analysis is used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two

variables" (p. 128). Coefficient values, represented as *r*, indicate positive or negative correlation

with either a -1, representing negative correlation, or +1, indicative of positive correlation

between variables (Pallant, 2010). According to Cohen's guidelines for measuring effect or

strength of a relationship, "r of $\pm$ .1, $\pm$ .3, and $\pm$ .5 as corresponding to small, medium, and large

effect sizes, respectively (Yockey, 2008, p. 161)". The Pearson r was also helpful to test the null

hypothesis, which hypothesized, "There was no relationship between MSW faculty's perception

of gatekeeping and their experience with gatekeeping practices in the hybrid/online teaching

environment." All of the post-Cronbach's α survey items were included in this analysis for

Research Questions 3 and 4 as shown in Table 13.

Table 25

Primary Teaching Environment =Hybrid/Online Pearson r Correlation Coefficient statistical test

		Perception of Experience with Gatekeeping Practices	Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures
		Correlations	
Perception of Experience with Gatekeeping Practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.469
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.289
	N	7	7
Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures	Pearson Correlation	.469	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.289	
	N	7	7

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the p < 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of experience with gatekeeping

practices and their perception of gatekeeping procedures in the hybrid/online teaching

environment was examined using Pearson *r* correlation coefficient. N=7 indicates the number of

participants included in the data analysis of Research Question 3. There was a highly moderate, positive relationship, $r = .469$, between the two examined variables, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW gatekeeping practices. There was not a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW Experience with gatekeeping, $p = .289$ at the $p < 0.01$ level. Therefore, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping and their experiences with practice in the hybrid/online teaching environment," was accepted.

Conclusion

The researcher sought to comparatively explore the perceptions of MSW faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices as well as to examine if there was a relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping responsibilities and their practice of gatekeeping procedures within fully accredited, hybrid/online and traditional programs. In this chapter the researcher discoursed, descriptively and inferentially, the data analysis results executed to answer the study's four research questions as well as to test each question's null hypothesis. The researcher also qualitatively reported participant responses to the qualitative questions included in the survey. The qualitative questions only applied to Research Questions 1 and 2.

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

    Null Hypothesis: "There was no difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures".

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

Null Hypothesis: "There was no difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices".

3. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

Null Hypothesis: "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment".

4. What is the relationship between hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

Null Hypothesis: "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with practice in the hybrid/online teaching environment".

Prior to conducting the data analysis, the researcher conducted a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient to test the internal consistency of instrument used in this study. The initial Cronbach's Alpha for all 35 items on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was .484. After re-analysis and the removal of 10 survey items, the final measure improved the Cronbach's α to .709, which greatly increased the reliability value from poor to fair indicating that the internal consistency of the instrument was acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Utilizing SPSS version 23 published by IBM, the researcher calculated measures of central tendency for descriptive analysis, which was helpful to describe participant's

demographic data, a *t*-test for independent samples as inferential data analysis was used to measure statistical significance with Research Questions 1 and 2, along with the Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient statistical test to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables in Research Questions 3 and 4.

Findings concluded that there was not a significant difference in the scores for MSW faculty who primarily teach in traditional/face-to-face environments (M = 4.03, SD = .34) and MSW faculty who primarily teach in hybrid/online environments (M = 3.93, SD = .32) environments; *t* (52) =.74, p=.463 when analyzing Research Question 1. As a result, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedure," was accepted. Results for Research Question 2 showed that there was not a significant difference in the scores for MSW faculty who primarily teach in traditional/face-to-face environments (M = 3.69, SD = .71) and MSW faculty who primarily teach in hybrid/online environments (M = 3.95, SD = .33) environments; *t* (52) =-.94, p=.353. Consequently, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices," was accepted. Data analysis for Research Question 3 rendered that there was a significant, medium/moderate, positive relationship, *r* = .378, between the two examined variables, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW experiences with gatekeeping practices, *p* = .009 at the *p* < 0.01 level; therefore, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment," was rejected. It was subsequently necessary to accept the alternative hypothesis, "There was a significant relationship between

MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment," which was accepted.

Lastly, statistical analysis of data for Research Question 4 concluded that there was a highly moderate, positive relationship, $r = .469$, between the two examined variables, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and MSW hybrid/online experiences with gatekeeping practices. There was not a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW experience with gatekeeping practices, $p = .289$ at the $p < 0.01$ level. As a result, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the hybrid/online teaching environment," was accepted.

In this chapter, the researcher reported out participant responses to the eight qualitative questions that were included in the Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. An analysis of participant responses rendered common themes for each of the eight qualitative survey questions. The amount of agreement was then determined through tallying the number of responses for each common theme. Thus, the amount of agreement represents the number of times the referenced common theme was mentioned by participants in the traditional learning environment as well as in hybrid/online learning environments. The researcher reported the top three themes, determined by amount of agreement, as well as provided examples of direct quotes from participants in support of that theme. The next chapter will interpretively discuss the data that were analyzed in this chapter as it relates to the study's research questions and hypotheses, as well as the theoretical framework.

Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

In 1943, psychologist Kurt Lewin introduced the concept of gatekeeping as the process of monitoring what is or is not allowed to enter through a gate or an entry point (Gieseking et al., 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Lewin's gatekeeping theory is currently utilized in professional areas such as communication media, higher education, nursing, law, social work, and other entities as a guide for making decisions as to what should or should not be allowed through various channels and gates (Gieseking et al., 2014). Lewin sought to examine the "psychological and non-psychological factors" (p. 85) present when seeking to understand a behavior along with what factors contribute to acts of decision-making (Gieseking et al., 2014). Psychological factors involved culture and past experiences, while non-psychological factors encompassed individual socioeconomic status, access to resources, and other external factors.

Rooted in Lewin's gatekeeping framework is social work's academic program process of accepting or rejecting student applicants as well as its process of remediation and/or interventions that are implemented when working with students who are demonstrating behaviors considered unsuitable for the profession (Cole, 1991). In this study, the gate was considered entry into a MSW program, being allowed to remain in a program, and/or being awarded the MSW degree at the time of completing a program.

Summary of Study

A review of the literature revealed that prior studies have explored the pros and cons of the advancement of traditional learning environments to online programming; however, the perception of MSW social work faculty, as it relates to gatekeeping in traditional versus

hybrid/online environment, appear to be nonexistent (Gilbert, 2014). Hence, the purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures as well as their gatekeeping practices in fully accredited, hybrid/online and traditional Master's level social work programs. In addition, the researcher intended to examine the relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping procedures in hybrid/online and traditional social work education. The research questions assessing the differences and relatedness between hybrid/online and traditional MSW social work faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices along with each question's Null Hypothesis were:

1. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

    a. Null Hypothesis: There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures.

2. What are the differences between traditional MSW faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices and those of hybrid/online MSW faculty?

    a. Null Hypothesis: There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online faculty experiences with gatekeeping practices.

3. What is the relationship between traditional MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

    a. Null Hypothesis: There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment.

4. What is the relationship between hybrid/online MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their practice of gatekeeping?

   a. Null Hypothesis: There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with practice in the hybrid/online teaching environment.

The researcher conducted this study remotely from a small, private university by way of email submission. The researcher, with permission from the author, adopted and modified Tam's (2004) gatekeeping survey to develop a mixed methods survey instrument for this study. Subsequently, the source of data collection in this study was the Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Quantitative questions consisted of a 5-point Likert-scale survey and qualitative questions were responded to in short answer form. The survey encompassed concepts of all four research questions. The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey was compiled of four sections: one demographic section, two quantitative sections involving perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and perceptions of experiences in gatekeeping practices, and one qualitative section that assessed both perception of gatekeeping procedures and perceptions of experiences in gatekeeping practices.

Conclusion and Discussion

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher proposed that the findings from this study would not only add to the dearth of existing literature with regard to social work faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and responsibilities, but would also contribute to the body of research concerning gatekeeping. Therefore, this research usage extends beyond the

profession of social work as it may be adaptable to other higher learning programs for helping professions including nursing, education, and counseling.

The researcher developed a theoretical framework comprised of gatekeeping theory, perception theory, culture theory, and decision-making theory to (a) assist readers in understanding the relevance of the variables used in this study; (b) provide a basis for the development of this study's research questions; and (c) comprehend the overall rationale for conducting the study (Simon & Goes, 2011). Supported by existing literature, the researcher posed that the level of effectiveness by which gatekeeping practices are implemented greatly hinges upon the gatekeeper's perception when making gatekeeping related decisions. Such interpretive processes and existing influences, hence perception, demand consideration when contemplating what may or may not influence when and how MSW faculty practice and make decisions as gatekeepers (Goodrich & Shin, 2013).

Similarly, existing literature has suggested that perception and culture develop over time and often affect one's decision-making processes (Rookes & Wilson, 2000; Saleebey, 1994; Weber & Hsee, 2000). The study both quantitatively and qualitatively assessed MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping practices and procedures, which included inquiry into the role of cultural influence when making gatekeeping decisions. The remainder of this chapter discusses the findings, implications for current practice, relevant literature, and recommendations for future practice for each research question. Final discussion will include the limitations of the study and the perceived generalizability of the results. The results of the study discussed in this subsection were analyzed in an attempt to answer the study research questions.

Research Question 1: Findings and Implications

Research Question 1 sought to assess if there was a significant difference between gatekeeping procedures followed by MSW faculty in both traditional learning as well as hybrid/online learning environments. The researcher calculated an independent samples t-test, which rendered the p value of .463, indicating that there is not a significant difference with gatekeeping procedures between both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments. Similarly, the Levene's test for Equality of Variances indicated that Equal variances assumed for MSW traditional and MSW hybrid/online faculty do not significantly differ from each other at the p = .820 level. Subsequently, the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedure was accepted.

In search a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping procedures, the researcher them coded participant responses, as it relates to gatekeeping procedures, to five of the eight qualitative questions that were included on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey: (a) Qual1: How do you define gatekeeping in social work; (b) Qual4: What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices (c) Qual6: What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education; (d) Qual7: What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping; and (e) Qual8: What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping practices. Supportive of the statistical analysis of the study's quantitative data, qualitative-coded theme data findings suggested that

there was not a significant difference in gatekeeping procedures between both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments. When asked how they defined gatekeeping in social work, the number one response for MSW faculty in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments was, "…through screening in and throughout the program." The second most reported theme in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments was Protection of future clients. Both responses are consistent with existing literature.

Ziomek-Daigle and Christensen (2010) defined gatekeeping as the process by which educators intervene and support students who fail to exhibit aptness within the program. Per Sowbel (2012), gatekeeping is the ethical duty of social work faculty to screen-out ill-equipped students as well as exiting student in the midst of their program who present a potential risk to future clients (Moore & Urwin, 1991). Miller and Koerin (2001) along with Elpers and Fitzgerald (2013) also described gatekeeping as an ongoing process. Subsequently, the researcher concludes that participants in both learning environments agree that gatekeeping in an on-going process, which should focus on ensuring that students practice in a manner that does not run the risk of harming future clients.

Most participants who primarily taught in the traditional environment stated that, "No barriers exist," which would hinder them from implementing gatekeeping practices. This is inconsistent with existing literature, as current literature described administrative pressure to increase and maintain high enrollment, fear of litigation, ambiguity of responsibility and roles, and conflicting personal values as barriers to the implementation of gatekeeping procedures (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Hutchens et al., 2013; Sowbel, 2011, 2012; Tam & Coleman, 2011; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). None of the participants who primarily taught in

hybrid/online learning environments agreed with this statement. Thus, the researcher inferentially posed the concept that perhaps, perceptions of lack of administrative and university backing, as named in some participant responses, may have contributed to this response. There were however, some levels of agreement, as shown in Table 12, between traditional and hybrid/online MSW faculties identified common themes. Such themes included the university's push for enrollment and University/Department resistance to dismiss students and push to ensure graduation. The latter common themes are represented in existing literature as previously stated.

When asked what can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education, the top response among MSW faculty who primarily taught in traditional learning environments was to "Develop clear policies." The second top identified a common theme among MSW faculty who primarily taught in traditional learning environment and the number one identified common theme among MSW faculty who primarily taught in hybrid/online learning environment was to provide practical training on gatekeeping. With regard to quality assurance, accreditation bodies such as the Council of Social Work Education provide accredited programs with a guideline for expected, professional behaviors (2008 EPAS Handbook, 2012; Cobb, Ramsdell, & Hunter, 2000; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995). The Social Work Profession is also guided by its Code of Ethics which explicitely clarifies what behaviors are acceptable and thus infers which are not (Currer & Atherton, 2008). Existing literature indicate that all faculty, including admission advisors, field directors, instructors, and administration, in both social work and counseling fields, are primarily responsible for fufilling the role of gatekeeper per the appropriate professional standards and ethic boards (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Gibbs and Macy (2000) similiarly

identified a list of roles sharing the responsibility for gatekeeping concluding that, "St+udents, faculty, field instructors, academic administrators, quality assurance entities, and the clientele" (p. 8) all hold some level of responsibility. Despite the recommendation that gatekeeping policies and procedures should be established-in writing (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010), the researcher is unaware of any existing literature or entity identifying who should be responsible for specifically implementing gatekeeping practices with students. Implications for current practice therefore include considering participants' responses with regard to ensuring that policies are clearly identified to include specific roles and responsibilities for gatekeeping responsibilities. Further implications for future practice include providing official, practical gatekeeping training on a regular basis to ensure that faculty is familiar with the organization's policy.

Particpants were presented with the qualitative questions, the first of which asked, "What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, pratices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping?" The researcher sought to better understand the role of cultural influences within the gatekeeper in this and the following question. The number one common theme, in both traditional, 67% of responses, and hybrid/online, 100% of responses, learning environments was, "Should be culturally sensitive", suggesting that gatekeepers should be culturally sensitive when viewing gatekeeping. Participants' responses in both environments were consistent with existing literature, which theorizes that culture has a role in decision making processes (Saleebey, 1994; Weber & Hsee, 2000). Shoemaker and Vos (2009) also described the intricate process of gatekeeping, as it relates to culture, as that act of "studying the

characteristics of people-their demographic profiles, their life experiences, their personal values and attitudes, and their work experiences" (p. 31).

Participants were also asked, "What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping procedures?" The most identified common theme for both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments was "No role," suggesting that while most of the participants in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments agreed that culture is relevant to the idea of gatekeeping, culture does not have a role in their willingness to implement gatekeeping procedures. Because gatekeeping is sometimes influenced by culture that ultimately involves decision making responsibilities, implications for current practice suggest that further conversation should be held discussing the role of culture in the development of gatekeeping policy and the making of gatekeeping decisions.

Research Question 2: Findings and Implications

Research Question 2 aimed to assess if there was a significant difference between gatekeeping practices implemented by MSW faculty in both traditional learning and hybrid/online learning environments. The researcher conducted an independent samples *t*-test, which rendered a p-value of .353, which indicated that there was not a significant difference between how MSW faculty in traditional learning environments and MSW faculty in online learning environments experience gatekeeping or practice gatekeeping. The results indicated that with equal variances assumed for MSW traditional/face-to-face and MSW hybrid/online, faculty do not significantly differ from each other at the p = .086. Subsequently, the null

hypothesis, "There was no significant difference between traditional MSW faculty and hybrid/online faculty's perception of gatekeeping practices," was accepted.

In an attempt to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping practices the researcher coded participant responses, as they related to gatekeeping practices, to three of the eight qualitative questions that were included on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. These include (a) Qual2, which asked, What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming; (b) Qual3, which asked What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to assess student suitability; (c) Qual6: How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effective? Similar to the responses of Research Question 1, the common themes, coded by levels of agreement, to Research Question 2 supported the statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

Professional behavior, described as ethical behavior, integrity, competence, and compliance with ethical standards, was the most identified common theme among participants in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments. This qualitative outcome data supports the statistical analysis of the quantitative data, which found that there was not a significant difference in the perception of gatekeeping practices among both traditional and hybrid/online learning environment groups. In many cases, student's professional behavior is best documented via field education evaluations. Existing literature supports this, as it is recommended that field instruction and field supervisor evaluations be used as a criterion for assessing both student process as well as suitability for the profession (Sowbel, 2011). The researcher, therefore, concluded that the gatekeeping practice of using professional behavior to measure student

suitability is similar in both traditional and hybrid/online learning environments, and is supported in current literature.

The researcher further sought to understand MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping practices by inquiring about what steps, in addition to those already established by the college/university, do you take to assess student suitability?" Fifty percent of responding participants in the traditional learning environment and 25% of responding participants in the hybrid/online learning environment identified with the common theme, "No additional steps/only follows policy". Based off the results, online/hybrid instructors are more likely to apply additional steps to assess student suitability. The second most identified common theme among MSW faculty who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment, at 27% of responding participants, and most identified common theme among MSW faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online, at 50% of responding participants, was, "Classroom observation followed by faculty collaboration." Implications from these findings suggest that gatekeeping practices are sometimes informal and on-going. Further implications suggest that faculty value discussing student behavior with colleagues, as well as student observation. Suggestions for current practice include regularly scheduled meetings among staff to discuss faculty observations of student behavior. The researcher poses that perhaps an identified committee would create a list of concerning behaviors to remove the level of subjectivity that may be present among faculty, especially being mindful of the influence of cultural diversity on decision making.

The qualitative question on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey, "How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effectiveness?" was used to

better understand if participants MSW programs perceived there to be a relationship between gatekeeping and program effectiveness and if so, how their program relates the two aspects. The top common theme identified by participants who primarily taught in both traditional learning environment and as well as hybrid/online learning environments was, "Closely related/When gatekeeping is implemented it infers program effectiveness." Holloway (2013) defined program effectiveness as:

> The activity of investigating the extent to which an educational effort has succeeded in building the practice competencies that it set out for its graduates to attain. The activity shifts the emphasis from a focus on what goes into the education to a focus on what comes out – the results of the educational process. That is, as a consequence of the educational experience, do the graduates demonstrate the requisite educational outcomes as specified by the Educational Policy and curriculum design? (p. 2)

The researcher is unaware of any existing literature that explicitly or inferentially examined gatekeeping and its relationship to program effectiveness. Based on participant responses and existing literature, it was assumed that participants believe that their MSW program related gatekeeping and program effectiveness and that the practice of gatekeeping influences program effectiveness. The fact that most participants believe this may be a reason why there is little research on the relationship of gatekeeping to program effectiveness because there does not seem to be an existing problem.

Research Question 3: Findings and Implications

Data analysis for Research Question 3 rendered that there was a significant, medium/moderate, positive relationship ($r = .378$) between the two examined variables, MSW

faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW experiences with gatekeeping practices ($p = .009$ at the $p < 0.01$ level). The null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment" was rejected. The alternative hypothesis, "There was a significant relationship between MSW faculty's perception of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the traditional teaching environment" was accepted.

In an attempt to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perception of gatekeeping procedures and practices, the researcher theme coded participant responses to eight qualitative questions that were included on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Questions targeting MSW faculty perceptions of *gatekeeping procedures* included Qual1 (How do you define gatekeeping in social work), Qual4 (What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices), Qual6 (What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education, Qual7 (What role does culture [ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values] hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping, and Qual8 (What role does culture [ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values] hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping practices). Questions targeting MSW faculty perceptions of *gatekeeping practices* were Qual2 (What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming), Qual3 (What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to assess student suitability), and Qual6 (How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effective).

Coded themed data to the aforementioned qualitative questions revealed that MSW faculty who primarily teach in the traditional learning environment view screening students into a program as well as throughout the duration of a program as the primary method for defining gatekeeping. They reported that the display of professional behavior is the primary criteria that they use to define professional suitability when screening students into their program. This method of determining student suitability for a program is greatly supported in existing literature (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Participants in this group primarily reported that they generally follow the policies set by their university/college; however, they stated that the development of clear policies would be the method most likely to strengthen gatekeeping practices.

There was a significant level of agreement within this group that gatekeeping and program effectiveness are related. The researcher was unaware of any existing literature that specifically assessed the relationship between gatekeeping and program effectiveness and thus finds it to be an implication for current practice as well as a recommendation for future study. The majority of respondents in this group reported that they perceive cultural sensitivity as relevant to gatekeeping. They also primarily reported that their perception that cultural sensitivity is relevant to gatekeeping practices does not have a place in their willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping practices. Participant responses suggest that MSW faculty value the role of culture in the lives of students; however, the value is not significant enough to give precedence to a cultural value over standard gatekeeping practices. The researcher further infers that faculty will implement gatekeeping practices regardless of a student's cultural

background and its influence in behavior. Each of these perceptions and reports of practice represent cohesiveness, hence a significant relationship, which aligns with the quantitative findings of this research question.

Research Question 4: Findings and Implications

Statistical analysis of data for Research Question 4 concluded that there was a highly moderate, positive relationship ($r = .469$) between the two examined variables, MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and MSW hybrid/online experiences with gatekeeping practices. There was not a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and MSW experience with gatekeeping practices ($p = .289$). As a result, the null hypothesis, "There was no significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping and their experiences with gatekeeping practices in the hybrid/online teaching environment" was accepted.

In an attempt to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices, the researcher theme coded participant responses to eight qualitative questions that were included on The Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey. Questions targeting MSW faculty perceptions of *gatekeeping procedures* included Qual1 (How do you define gatekeeping in social work); Qual4 (What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices); Qual6 (What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education); Qual7 (What role does culture [ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values] hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping; and Qual8 (What role does culture [ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values] hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in

gatekeeping practices. Questions targeting MSW faculty perceptions of *gatekeeping practices* were, Qual2 (What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming), Qual3 (What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to assess student suitability, and Qual6 (How does your MSW program relate gatekeeping and program effective).

Theme coded data to the aforementioned qualitative questions revealed that MSW faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online learning environments viewed screening students into program as well as throughout the duration of a program as the primary method for defining gatekeeping. Similar to MSW faculty who primarily taught in the traditional environment, they reported that the display of professional behavior is the primary criteria that they use to define professional suitability when screening students into their program, which is supported in existing literature (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Gibbs & Macy, 2000; Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2013; Holloway, 2013; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Jenkins, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Participants in this group primarily reported that in addition to policy established by their university/college, they utilize behavior observed in class, followed by faculty collaboration as preferred criteria to determine student suitability. This method of assessing for student suitability is consistent with the expectations of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards by which accredited programs receive their accreditation (CSWE, 2015). The majority of respondents in this group reported that they perceive cultural sensitivity as relevant to gatekeeping, which is supported in existing literature (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). They also primarily reported that their perception that cultural sensitivity is relevant to gatekeeping practices does not have a place in their willingness to implement or partake in

gatekeeping practices. Each of these perceptions and reports of practice represent cohesiveness, hence a significant relationship, which aligns with the quantitative findings of this research question.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study exists with the instrument that was used in this study. The researcher, with permission from the author, adopted and modified Tam's (2004) gatekeeping survey to develop a mixed methods survey instrument for this study. The instrument presents a limitation in that prior to the study, the instrument was not reliable. To deal with this limitation, the researcher piloted the survey with five different experts relative to gatekeeping and social work to establish face validity with the instrument. Recommendations from the survey's pilot were applied to improve the face validity of the instrument.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling methods. There was significant limitation present due to the minimal representation of responses received from MSW faculty who primarily taught in the hybrid/online committee compared to large number of responses received from MSW faculty who primarily taught in the traditional learning environment, 47 traditional faculty and 7 hybrid/online faculty. There were issues with accessibility to hybrid/online learning environment instructors, which resulted in the limited representation of hybrid/online learning environment instructors who participated in comparison to traditional environment instructors. According to Creswell (2012), when there are issues with the nature of accessibility and willingness, "the researcher cannot say with confidence that the individuals are representative of the population" (p. 145). Due to the lower number of participants from the hybrid/online learning environment, the researcher solicited additional participants from three

different listservs. The additional efforts to attain responses from participants who would increase representation of the hybrid/online learning environment was intended to address the limitation of unbalanced representation of both groups and inherently addressed the limitation with the convenience sampling method.

Recommendation for Future Study

Statistical analysis findings indicated that there was not a significant difference in gatekeeping procedures between MSW Faculty in traditional teacher environments and MSW Faculty in hybrid/online teaching environments or in gatekeeping practices between MSW Faculty in traditional teacher environments and MSW Faculty in hybrid/online teaching environments. The findings of the common themes found in the qualitative coding analysis mostly supported the quantitative data for all four of the study's research questions. In addition, existing literature was mostly supportive of both the quantitative and qualitative findings. The primary discrepancy was found in area of cultural relevance when considering gatekeeping as well as when considering implementing gatekeeping. Consequently, the researcher recommends that future studies should specifically examine the relationship between culture and gatekeeping as it relates to decision making. The researcher specifically recommends that the study be qualitative and possibly utilize a focus group as a method of data collection in order to gain further insight into thoughts and processes related to decision making.

Another recommendation for future study was to further assess the relationship between gatekeeping and program effectiveness in both environments, with an equal focus on program effectiveness. The researcher also recommends that a similar study be done, which would increase the liability that the results could be generalizable for the hybrid/online learning

environment. Increased representation of the hybrid/online learning environment would allow for stratifying the results of both groups and will ultimately render the results generalizable and comparable.

In reflection, the researcher would recommend that anyone looking to replicate this study conduct a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient test to assess the internal consistency of the study's instrument prior to submitting the survey for data collection. In hindsight, had the researcher done this, additional steps would have been taken to gather more information from participants in the fashion of a telephone interview, which may have allowed fewer questions to be removed when seeking internal consistency. Consequentially, having conducted the Cronbach Alpha prior to submitting the survey may have increased the likelihood that the qualitative and quantitative data would have been viewed with equal value. In further reflection, the researcher would include more questions specific to gatekeeping steps that are actually practiced.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to comparatively explore the perceptions of social work faculty regarding gatekeeping procedures and practices in fully accredited, online and traditional Master's level social work programs. The researcher also sought to determine if there was a relationship between faculty perceptions of gatekeeping responsibilities and their practice of gatekeeping procedures with MSW faculty in online and traditional programs.

Findings concluded that there is not a significant difference between MSW faculty in traditional learning environments and MSW faculty in hybrid/online learning environments procedures and practices. Common themes reported by participants regarding defining

gatekeeping, methods for strengthening gatekeeping procedures, barriers to gatekeeping practices, and the role of cultural influence on gatekeeping practices were primarily consistent with existing literature and the theoretical framework introduced by the researcher.

With regard to the correlation component of the study, findings concluded that there was a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and their perception of gatekeeping practices in traditional learning environments. There was not a significant relationship between MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and their perception of gatekeeping practices in hybrid/online learning environments.

The study was and explored existing perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices along with the relationship strengths between gatekeeping practices and procedures in traditional learning environments as well as gatekeeping practices and procedures in hybrid/online learning environments, serves as foundational to this area of study. Therefore, the researcher strongly recommends future studies aligned with the purpose of this study to seek to substantiate this study's findings.

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Appendix A

Pre-Pilot Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey

Please be sure to complete the survey based on the primary MSW programming, learning environment that you provide instruction in, online or traditional.

Section I: Demographic Information

The statements in this section are designed to provide generalized, background information about you. Your responses will be helpful to compare MSW faculty perceptions of gatekeeping procedures and practices between online and traditional programs. Your response will also assist in assessing the relationship between MSW faculty perception and their practice of gatekeeping. Please select the response that best describes you.

1. My primary teaching environment is _____.

  ☐ Traditional (face-to-face)
  ☐ Online

2. My Gender is…

  ☐ Male
  ☐ Female

3. I hold the following credentials…

  ☐ Baccalaureate of Social Work Degree (BSW)
  ☐ Other Baccalaureate Degree
  ☐ Masters of Social Work Degree (MSW)
  ☐ Other Master's Degree
  ☐ Doctorate of Social Work
  ☐ Other Doctorate Degree
  ☐ Licensed Social Worker
  ☐ Licensed Clinical Social Worker

4. I have the following years of experience as a social worker…

  ☐ 0-5
  ☐ 6-10
  ☐ 11-15
  ☐ 16-20
  ☐ 21 or more

5. I have the following number of years in higher education…

   ☐ 0-5
   ☐ 6-10
   ☐ 11-15
   ☐ 16-20
   ☐ 21 or more

6. I did/did not receive training on gatekeeping.

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

7. I have experience working with MSW students who I considered as unsuitable to practice

social work.

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

8. I am currently employed at a _____ college or university.

   ☐ Public
   ☐ Private

9. I am currently employed as _____ faculty.

   ☐ Part-time adjunct
   ☐ Full-time adjunct
   ☐ Full-time
   ☐ Tenured

10. My job title is best described as _____.

   ☐ Director of Field Education
   ☐ MSW Department Chair/Program Director
   ☐ Field Instructor
   ☐ Social Work Faculty

11. When seeking my degree in social work, I took more than 50% of classes in the following

environment:

   ☐ Online
   ☐ Traditional

Section II: Gatekeeping Procedures

The statements in this section are intended to gain an understanding of your thoughts, attitudes, and views toward *gatekeeping procedures* in the educational environment of which you teach, online or traditional. In this study, 'Gatekeeping Procedures' is defined as a set of rules or regulations to be followed when a MSW student's academic performance, or non-academic behavior, are deemed to be inappropriate and/or unacceptable. Using the Likert type scale, please select the response that best represents your views.

On the following scale, please select the appropriate response which best represents your thoughts, attitudes, and views.

5-Strongly Disagree	4-Disagree	3-Neutral	2-Agree	1-Strongly Agree

Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures

1. I am able to devote the time required to document failing performance.
2. I am willing to confront a student's poor work at the risk of alienating the student.
3. If a student's fieldwork performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of aptitude for social work" more strongly than "lack of experience."
4. If a student's fieldwork performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of experience" for social work" more strongly than "lack of aptitude."
5. I would pursue failing a student even if my administration did not support it.
6. I would pursue all avenues to prevent a student who is performing inadequately in the field to enter the profession.
7. I am willing to risk examination of my professional judgments in order to assert my right to fail an inadequate student.
8. Fear of litigation is the major reason that prevents me from giving a fail grade to a student
9. Fear of litigation is a primary reason that prevents me from giving a fail grade to a student.
10. Administration needs to provide more field instruction training to field instructors and faculty.
11. The field instruction training for field instructors provided by administration is inadequate.
12. Existing policy for failing a student for unsatisfactory fieldwork performance is well written in the field work manual.
13. My professional judgment regarding student's performance is well respected by administration.
14. Gatekeeping should take place prior to students being admitted into the program
15. Gatekeeping is an ongoing process (i.e. starts pre-admissions and continues until the student graduates).
16. I am clear about my role/duty in gatekeeping.

17. I am responsible for evaluating student fit for the profession.
18. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the field director with MSW students.
19. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to social work faculty with MSW students.
20. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the university's admissions department with MSW students.
21. The responsibility of gatekeeping is a collective responsibility (i.e. university admissions, social work faculty, and field director) with MSW students.
22. Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is effective.
23. Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is not effective.
24. Gatekeeping should differ between online and traditional MSW programming.
25. My personal culture contributes to the view(s) I have towards gatekeeping.
26. The culture of my college/university contributes to the view(s) I have towards gatekeeping.
27. Faculty should consider the culture of a student when considering gatekeeping procedures to address concerns with student suitability.

Section III: Gatekeeping Practices

The statements in this section aim to learn what your actual ***gatekeeping practices*** are in the educational program of which you instruct, online or traditional. In this study, 'Gatekeeping Practices' is defined as current or previous actions taken in alignment with a set of rules or regulations required by college or university guidelines.

On the following scale, please select the appropriate response which best represents your thoughts, attitudes, and views.

5-Strongly Disagree	4-Disagree	3-Neutral	2-Agree	1-Strongly Agree

Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices

1. My college/university includes standardized test scores as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
2. My college/university includes telephone or in-person interviews as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
3. My college/university includes writing samples as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
4. The lack of measurable practice standards in social work does not deter me from failing a student due to poor performance.
5. I have recommended student(s) for gatekeeping due to poor academic performance.
6. I have recommended student(s) for gatekeeping due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
7. I have recommended a student be removed from our MSW program due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
8. I have recommended a student receive remediation through gatekeeping procedures due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
9. I am an active participant on the gatekeeping committee at my college/university.
10. I have failed students who have earned failing grades.
11. I have given passing grades to students who did not earn them.
12. I have failed students when other teachers would not.
13. I generally practice gatekeeping procedures regardless of a student's emotional status.
14. I consider the culture of a student before implementing or recommending gatekeeping procedures.

Section IV: Perceptions and Practices

The qualitative questions in this section are designed to gain a deeper understanding of your thoughts, attitudes, and views towards *gatekeeping procedures*. These questions also aim to better understand your past and present experiences with *gatekeeping practices*. Please answer these questions as detailed as possible.

1. How do you define gatekeeping in social work?

2. What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming?

3. What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to access student suitability?

4. What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices?

5. How does your program relate gatekeeping and program effectiveness?

6. What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education?

7. What role does culture hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping?

8. What role does culture hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping procedures?

Appendix B

Social Work Faculty's Perception and Practice Survey (Revised)

Please be sure to complete the survey based on the primary MSW programming, learning environment that you provide instruction in, online or traditional. You must choose one, not both.

Gatekeeping Defined: The method by which social work faculty fulfill their professional responsibility to ethically examine student suitability during pre-admission into a MSW program as well as ongoing until graduation.
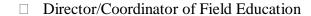
Section I: Demographic Information

Please select the response that best describes you by clicking in the box next to each answer.

1. My Gender is…

   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female

2. My racial background is…

   ☐ Black or African American
   ☐ Asian
   ☐ American Indian or Native American
   ☐ White or Caucasian
   ☐ Latino
   ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   ☐ Bi-racial
   ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. My primary teaching environment is _____.

   ☐ Traditional (face-to-face)
   ☐ Online

4. I hold the following credentials (please select all that apply)…

   ☐ Baccalaureate of Social Work Degree (BSW)
   ☐ Other Baccalaureate Degree
   ☐ Masters of Social Work Degree (MSW)
   ☐ Other Master's Degree
   ☐ Doctorate of Social Work

- ☐ Other Doctorate Degree
- ☐ Licensed Social Worker
- ☐ Licensed Clinical Social Worker

5. I have the following years of experience as a social worker…

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21 or more

5. I have the following number of years in higher education…

- ☐ 0-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 16-20
- ☐ 21 or more

6. Have you ever received training on gatekeeping?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Have you ever had experience working with MSW students whom you considered as unsuitable to practice social work?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. I am currently employed at a _____ college or university.

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Religious affiliated

9. The following best describes my employment status...

- ☐ Part-time adjunct
- ☐ Full-time Faculty
- ☐ Tenured Track
- ☐ Tenured

10. My job title is best described as _____.

- ☐ Director/Coordinator of Field Education

☐ MSW Department Chair/Program Director
☐ Social Work Faculty

11. When seeking a MSW degree in social work, I took more than 50% of classes in the following environment:

☐ Online
☐ Traditional

Section II: Gatekeeping Procedures

This section seeks to gain an understanding of your thoughts, attitudes, and views toward *gatekeeping procedures* in the educational environment of which you teach-online or traditional. For the purpose of this survey, 'Gatekeeping Procedures' is defined as a set of rules or regulations to be followed when a MSW student's academic performance, or non-academic behavior, are deemed to be inappropriate and/or unacceptable. Using the Likert type scale, please select the response that best represents your views.

On the following scale, please select the appropriate response which best represents your thoughts, attitudes, and views.

1-Strongly Disagree	2-Disagree	3-Neutral	4-Agree	5-Strongly Agree

Perception of Gatekeeping Procedures

1. I am able to devote the time required to document failing performance.
2. I am willing to confront a student's poor work at the risk of alienating the student.
3. If a student's work performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of aptitude for social work" more strongly than "lack of experience."
4. If a student's work performance is very weak, I am inclined to consider "lack of experience" for social work" more strongly than "lack of aptitude."
5. I would fail a student even if my department chair or program director did not support it.
6. I would pursue all avenues to prevent a student who is performing inadequately in the field to enter the profession.
7. I am willing to risk examination of my professional judgments in order to assert my right to fail an inadequate student.
8. Fear of litigation is the major reason that prevents me from giving a fail grade to a student
9. Fear of litigation is a primary reason that prevents me from giving a fail grade to a student.
10. The Department Chair needs to provide more training to instructors and faculty regarding student suitability for the social work profession.
11. Existing policy for failing a student for unsatisfactory work performance is well written in the social work student manual.
12. My professional judgment regarding student's performance is well respected by the Department Chair and/or the MSW Program Director.
13. Gatekeeping should take place prior to students being admitted into the program
14. Gatekeeping is an ongoing process (i.e. starts pre-admissions and continues until the student graduates).
15. I am clear about my role/duty in gatekeeping.
16. I am responsible for evaluating student fit for the profession.

17. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the field director with MSW students.
18. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to social work faculty with MSW students.
19. The primary responsibility of gatekeeping belongs to the university's admissions department with MSW students.
20. The responsibility of gatekeeping is a collective responsibility (i.e. university admissions, social work faculty, and field director) with MSW students.
21. Remediation through gatekeeping procedures is effective.
22. Gatekeeping should differ between online and traditional MSW Programs.
23. My personal culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) contributes to the view(s) I have towards gatekeeping.
24. The culture of my college/university contributes to the view(s) I have towards gatekeeping.
25. Faculty should consider the culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) of a student when considering gatekeeping procedures to address concerns with student suitability.

Section III: Gatekeeping Practices

This section aims to learn what your actual *gatekeeping practices* are in the educational program of which you instruct, online or traditional. In this survey, 'Gatekeeping Practices' is defined as current or previous actions taken in alignment with a set of rules or regulations required by college or university guidelines.

On the following scale, please select the appropriate response which best represents your thoughts, attitudes, and views.

1-Strongly Disagree	2-Disagree	3-Neutral	4-Agree	5-Strongly Agree

Experiences of Gatekeeping Practices

1. My college/university includes standardized test scores as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
2. My college/university includes telephone or in-person interviews as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
3. My college/university includes writing samples as a factor when considering admittance into a MSW program.
4. The lack of measurable practice standards in social work does not deter me from failing a student due to poor performance.
5. I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to poor academic performance.
6. I have recommended student(s) to the student review committee due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
7. I have recommended a student be removed from our MSW program due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
8. I have recommended a student receive remediation through gatekeeping procedures due to concerns with student suitability for the profession.
9. I am an active participant on the student review committee at my college/university.
10. I have failed students who have earned failing grades.
11. I have given passing grades to students who did not earn them.
12. I have failed students when other teachers would not.
13. I generally practice gatekeeping procedures regardless of a student's emotional status.
14. I consider culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) of a student before implementing or recommending gatekeeping procedures.

Section IV: Perceptions and Practices

The qualitative questions in this section are designed to gain a deeper understanding of your thoughts, attitudes, and views towards *gatekeeping procedures*. These questions also aim to better understand your past and present experiences with *gatekeeping practices*. Please answer these questions as detailed as possible.

1. How do you define gatekeeping in social work?

2. What criteria do you use to define professional suitability for MSW level programming?

3. What steps, in addition to those already established by your college/university, do you take to access student suitability?

4. What barriers exists that may affect you from implementing gatekeeping practices?

5. How does your program relate gatekeeping and program effectiveness?

6. What can be done to strengthen existing gatekeeping mechanisms for social work field education?

7. What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your view of gatekeeping?

8. What role does culture (ethnic and racial customs, practices, beliefs, experiences, and values) hold with regard to your willingness to implement or partake in gatekeeping procedures?