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Policy Practice of Master of Social Work Students: An Analysis of a Policy Practice Intervention

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POLICY PRACTICE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS:

AN ANALYSIS OF A POLICY PRACTICE INTERVENTION

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A Project

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

_____

by

Sarah Wright

June 2019

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant
difference in the levels of political engagement from a University in Southern
California Master of Social Work (MSW) students that participated in the National
Association of Social Workers (NASW) -CA Lobby Days and students who do not
participate. This study examined the NASW- CA Lobby Days as an intervention
of experiential learning as existing literature explains experiential learning to be
an effective method for learning policy practice. Using a quantitative approach by
looking at student scores from the Political Activities Survey (PAS) which was
distributed to MSW students at a University in Southern California Survey results
were analyzed by comparing average scores between the control and
intervention groups. Research findings suggest that a relationship exists between
Lobby Days Participation and political engagement activities of voting in local
elections, contacting legislators, participating in protests of social
demonstrations, participating in service clubs, and participating in service clubs
as service club officers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

Each year, the California Chapter of the NASW hosts an event known as Lobby Days in Sacramento in which MSW students meet with their state legislators to discuss three NASW endorsed bills (Legislative Lobby Days, 2017). MSW students from California Universities attend each year and from observation show an interest in policy practice. This contradicts research that finds that social workers and social work students have little interest in policy practice and lower levels of political competency (Anderson & Harris, 2005). However, not much is known strictly about the levels of political engagement after MSW students attend Lobby Days or if it coincides with existing research about political practice among social workers and social work students.

As a type of macro practice, policy practice is important to social work because it looks to create change for vulnerable populations that social workers serve through legislation and political action. That is why the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) mandates for schools of social work to incorporate policy practice into the curriculum for social work students (Heidemann, 2011). Even though the importance of policy practice is recognized by the CSWE and other social workers, it is still not clearly being represented or received well in classrooms of future social workers.

Existing research shows that social workers are not comfortable with policy practice (Rocha, Poe, & Thomas, 2010). In addition, social work students have a major dislike for policy courses (Anderson & Harris, 2005). The dislike and lack of policy practice among social workers creates a problem in the profession since it is something mandated in the code of ethics. Section 6.04 of the social work code of ethics states that social workers have a duty to carry out social and political action in which they advocate for basic human needs and prevent discrimination of any kind to all people (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). When social workers do not fulfill this duty, they are not fully engaging with all aspects of the social work profession which leads to some issues in macro practice.

For example, a ramification that this problem has in macro practice is that a lack of policy practice affects the state of the most vulnerable populations that social workers assist. This is because policy practice recognizes that problems that exist within clients or individuals occur because of personal factors but also because of external factors. Thus, policy practice is the most suitable intervention for clients as it seeks to address and fix these external problems that inhibit on lives of individuals (Weiss-Gal, 2008). The lack of this type of intervention would then force social workers to rely solely on their direct practice skills to improve the quality of lives for their clients, a task that could potentially be greater than the capacity of the social work profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find if the NASW-CA Lobby Days makes a significant impact on the levels of political engagement among MSW students. Thus, the study examined the dynamics of policy practice curriculum for social work students with a look at the impact of experiential learning. As students receive policy practice in the classroom setting, some research suggests that this is not enough for individuals to want to pursue policy practice as it can be dry and lack personal involvement (Heidemann, 2011). Lobby Days as an intervention is therefore fitting for this study as it requires involvement and participation from students.

Since this study examined the effects of Lobby Days as an intervention, the research methods used are a post-test comparison study design. The results are based as a comparison between students that attended Lobby Days and students that did not attend Lobby Days to see if there was a significant difference in their levels of political engagement. The instrument used to determine the levels of political engagement between the two groups was a survey designed by Verba, Lehman Schlozman, and Brady (1995) which was used to determine levels of political engagement among the general public.

The purpose of using the post-test comparison study design is to investigate if experiential learnings, such as Lobby Days, are as valuable as existing literature suggests. Since MSW students already learn about macro social work and policy practice in their required curriculum, some might suggest that students do not need to attend Lobby Days to become politically active.

However, research from Heidemann (2011) suggests that lessons in the classroom are not enough to make social work students politically competent and willing to participate in policy practice. The comparison of the two groups that participated and did not participate in this intervention show more clearly how much more experiential learning adds to social work students' enthusiasm for policy practice.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

Studying this problem is important to social work macro practice because of the capacity for change outlined by these types of opportunities. This study examined how the NASW Lobby Days affected MSW students and determined that the impact of the experience in their level of policy practice. Since there is not any clear data on the effect that this event has on MSW students, the information from this study then identifies to the social work community specific impacts that MSW students receive from Lobby Days and how these narratives can be used to encourage more students to attend in the future. By assessing the impact that this event has on MSW students, the study also identified the distinction of MSW students from existing research of social work students' policy practice interest.

The findings from this research identify reasons to promote and build upon Lobby Days for experiential learning for future MSW students, and other social work schools as well. As a significant impact was found in the levels of political engagement among students that attend Lobby Days, more support can be

sought out for expanding Lobby Days among university social work programs. This requires implementation and program development to design this as an opportunity for all students to attend including those that may not have the resources to take advantage of this opportunity.

That is why this project looks at the following: how does the experience of the NASW Lobby Days create an interest in political engagement among MSW students?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter outlines existing literature related to policy practice in the field of social work and among social work students. The findings examine reasons why policy practice is not common among the social work profession as well as in social work curriculum. As the extent of policy practice in the social work profession is sometimes debated, this chapter will also explore why this is debated and current findings in this realm. With these findings, this chapter then discusses why the proposed study is needed. Lastly, this chapter explains the theoretical framework that guiding this research and study.

Existing Literature

Few studies attempt to explore policy practice among social workers and fewer studies attempt to explore policy practice in social work curriculum. Evidence suggests that schools of social work focus more on training their students in counseling (Castillo, 2012). This is because schools prepare students more for clinical and direct practice than policy practice (Felderhoff, Hoefer, & Watson, 2016). One reason for this could be that many students are working toward preparing for licensing exams after graduating (Wolk, Pray, Weismiller, & Dempsey, 1996). However, other evidence shows that policy courses are ranked among some of the least desired courses for social work students (Anderson &

Harris, 2005). This could be for reasons such as a lack of faculty that are fit to teach policy courses or that the policy courses themselves tend to be a dry analysis of social welfare policies (Heidemann, 2011).

Even though these findings exist, researchers still emphasize the importance that policy practice has in the classroom. One important factor that contributes to social workers lack of political practice is that they do not feel politically competent enough (Rocha et al., 2010). This can be because social workers lack the skill set for policy practice (Ritter, 2007). In their research, Wolk et al. (1996) calls on social work schools to play a bigger part for students to become politically active. Research shows that policy education increases feelings of competency which then leads to an increase in political activity (Rocha et al., 2010). However, many students do not receive opportunities to become competent in policy practice (Pritzker & Lane, 2014).

Some scholars suggest that experiential learning helps to ease social work students into any resistance they may have to policy courses (Byers, 2014). In addition, evidence supports that experiential learning helps build a link between course content and practical experience (Anderson & Harris, 2005; Heidemann, 2011).

While much of the available research establishes the importance of policy practice among social work students and the impact that schools have on this issue, there is little research that looks at impacts of policy practice interventions among social work students. Experiential learning is explored in research from Byers (2014), Anderson and Harris (2005), and Heidemann (2011) but even in

these studies little is discussed on actual interventions that examine if indeed it does impact social work students in comparison to other methods of teaching policy practice.

Conflicting Findings:
How Politically Active are Social Workers?

There are a lot of disparities that exist about the extent of political involvement among social workers. Some researchers note that social workers are more politically engaged compared to the general public, illustrating that social workers operate at a high level of political engagement (Rocha et al., 2010). It is also noted that social workers are less politically engaged in comparison to closely related professions, illustrating that social workers do not operate at a high level of political engagement (Felderhoff et al., 2016). In one study that questioned specifically if social workers live up to their political mandate in the code of ethics, most social workers responded that they did not feel that their peers lived up to this expectation (Felderhoff et al., 2016).

Defining Political Engagement

The reason for conflicting statements of political engagement among social workers could be a result of a difference in how to define political engagement. Jansson (as cited in Sherraden et al., 2002). describes policy practice as helping powerless and oppressed populations improve their well-being Rocha et al. (2010) narrows this definition to strictly activities carried out within the political system. In their work, Felderhoff et al. (2016), better defines political engagement into two categories which encompass both Jansson and

Rocha et al.'s (2010) definitions; indirect political engagement and direct political engagement Indirect political activities are explained as donating time, money, or effort to influence electoral results (Felderhoff et al., 2016). Direct political activities are explained as direct communication with public officials by attending meetings, working on political campaigns, attending demonstrations, or making a phone call or writing a letter to a public official (Felderhoff et al., 2016).

Their work found that social workers perform a significant amount of indirect political activities but fewer direct political activities (Felderhoff et al., 2016). These results establish that social workers commit themselves to less demanding levels of political engagement and shows a lack of comfort with civic activities (Felderhoff et al., 2016). Another study shows the same results, that social workers are more likely to perform indirect political action and less likely to perform direct political action (Ritter, 2007).

Predictors of Political Practice

Among these discrepancies in research there are still a few key findings. One of the common findings among research is that a good predictor of political practice is political interest and political self-efficacy (Rocha et al., 2010). Possessing these two qualities serves as a strength in political practice and must be better enhanced in the social work profession.

Reasons Why Proposed Study is Needed

As previously mentioned, social work schools can have a critical impact on interest and competency for political practice. In fact, researchers asked social

workers in the field if they felt prepared for political practice with their education and received many of the responses saying no with feelings of inadequacy in the classroom in terms of political practice (Anderson & Harris, 2005).

One of the reasons why social work schools can have a major impact on students for political practice is because evidence suggests that social work students who are politically active in school are more likely to be politically active after graduating (Rocha, et al., 2010). This relates back to the previously mentioned research that shows policy practice education and learning through experience aiding to increased feelings of political competence and political interest. It also builds up a set of political practice skills necessary to use for political engagement after graduation.

Given this research, Lobby Days for MSW students is an acceptable intervention for testing this problem formulation. The Lobby Days intervention in an experiential learning opportunity that is not only designed to increase coherence of classroom learning with practice but also to empower students. Since Lobby Days is also a program that continues to grow each year among the social work community, this intervention will also be an appropriate one to gauge the effectiveness of it in comparison to students that do not attend. Gauging this effectiveness will also be critical to social work research as this topic has not been specifically examined among social work students.

Therefore, the question of how the experience of the NASW Lobby Days creates an interest in political engagement among MSW students will be answered clearly through this intervention and study.

As noted in the literature gaps, most studies in this area attempt to find issues of why social work schools do not emphasize policy practice as much as direct practice. In addition, other studies attempt to find issues as to why social workers do not engage in policy practice. This study will attempt to see how a specific policy practice as an intervention inspires political interest and ensures political competency which will thus have an impact on political engagement, in comparison to students that did not participate in this intervention.

<center>Theories Guiding Conceptualization:
Civic Voluntarism Model</center>

As recognized previously, political engagement can be defined several ways. For the terms of this study, Felderhoff et al.'s definition of direct and indirect political engagement will be used. It will be coupled with the framework that their study built upon from the civic voluntarism model.

While drawing upon some of these frameworks, the study of this research will primarily center around the civic voluntarism model. Used in other research to examine the political engagement of social workers, the civic voluntarism model looks at three contributing factors that lead to political participation (Ritter, 2007). These three factors are resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment (Ritter, 2007). Resources are defined by time, money, and civic skills while psychological engagement is defined by political interest, political efficacy, political information, partisanship, and family influences (Ritter, 2007). In their study, Ritter found resources and psychological engagement to be major factors that increased political participation (2007).

<center>11</center>

The civic voluntarism model is not a theory used only to address political engagement of social workers. Verba et al. created this model to analyze the political activities of the general public (Ritter, 2007). By using this model and framework established outside of social work research, this study will use a multidisciplinary approach to analyze the political engagement of social work students.

Summary

The existing findings and literature presented here help construct the framework of ideas for this study. The analysis of the ways in which policy practice is presented in schools, the scope of policy practice within the field of social work, and the consideration of how policy practice is defined can all be organized into the idea of the civic voluntarism model. The framework of the civic voluntarism model and the idea of experiential learning in this analysis demonstrate a well-suited theory to put to test with the idea of political engagement and social work students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This research project examines if experiential learning occurrences, such as Lobby Days, make a significant impact on the levels of political engagement among MSW students. This chapter discusses the specifics of the research design and methods that this study uses. To describe this in detail, this chapter looks at the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis of this research study.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to describe and identify the differences in levels of political engagement created from participating in experiential learning opportunities, such as Lobby Days. Since there are multiple ways to define political engagement, as discussed in chapter two, the most appropriate way to look at the levels of political engagement among the study participants was through a descriptive study. This identified the specific ways in which MSW students carry out political activities and the frequencies with which they engage in political activities. From this data, each definition of political engagement was explored and analyzed. Therefore, a quantitative study was necessary to inquire and measure specific activities and frequencies.

As the test was administered after the Lobby Days intervention took place, the design of the study was a post-test analysis. Additionally, since the test results compared students that participated in the intervention with students that did not participate in the intervention (the control group), the study design was also a comparison. Thus, this research study design was a post-test comparison analysis.

One strength of this research design was that it improved the feasibility of the data collection process. As there was only one test that needed to be administered, data collection was practical as there was not a follow up test to gather and collect. In addition, the control group and the intervention group were given the same test, making the distribution and analysis of the data easier for the comparison.

A limitation of this study was that the study design did not utilize random sampling, limiting the generalizability of the sample. Another limitation is that the study design did not utilize a pre-test or a post-test to capture baseline data and possible changes from after the Lobby Days intervention. These limitations limit what can be definitively inferred from this research.

Sampling

This study sampled MSW students from a University in Southern California and approval was requested from the School of Social Work Department Chair. The study surveyed all students in the MSW program, therefore using a non-random, availability sampling technique. All students were

considered in this study for the purposes of achieving results representative to the entire student body to best examine the comparison analysis for this research. Additionally, as it was a quantitative study, to yield best results, it was ideal to collect a greater number of surveys for the most accurate results representative to the population. Out of all students surveyed in the MSW program, n=158 survey responses were collected and recorded in this study. Since this study looked specifically at MSW students, the availability sampling was appropriate to this population, however these results may not be generalizable to other MSW schools that attend NASW Lobby Days.

Data Collection and Instruments

The instrument designed by Verba et al. (1995), the PAS, was used to survey MSW students. The questions produced a set of quantitative answers which was analyzed by the political participation of MSW students to gauge their level of interest in policy practice. The original PAS is quite lengthy and relative to the 1988 presidential election cycle. Thus, this survey was slightly adapted with fewer questions and newer dates.

The independent variable was participation in the Lobby Days intervention. It contained a nominal dichotomous measurement with values as yes or no to the participation of the intervention. The dependent variable was the level of political engagement, an interval level score on the political activities scale previously described and contains an internal measurement. Since the questions in the instrument included a range of different political activities

designed by researchers in this field, the instrument is considered to have content validity. The reliability of the instrument had a Cronbach's alpha of .61 in previous studies (Ritter, 2007).

One strength of the PAS instrument was that it includes a variety of political activities. These different types of political activities are separated into eight domains which are voting, campaign work, campaign contributions, community activity, contacting, protesting, political organization, and political mail contributions (Verba et al., 1995. As prior research on this topic suggests, there are multiple ways to define political engagement, such as conducting direct and indirect political activities. With the variety of political activities that this instrument inquired about, one can analyze the different types of political activities that MSW students participated in to gain a better insight of the effects of experiential learning. Lastly, another strength that this research had was that the PAS had been used in multiple studies, making it a reliable and respected instrument in analyzing this topic.

One limitation was that the PAS has a lower reliability score. However, the reliability remains sufficient as the instrument had been reused by other researchers.

Procedures

Each MSW student at this university was invited to participate in the voluntary study. Hard copy surveys were distributed and collected in every on-campus cohort classroom to those who volunteered to participate. These surveys

were self-distributed and self-collected to the on-campus cohorts. For the online cohorts, an online survey, using the University's Qualtrics system, was administered to them. An admissions assistant, distributed the online surveys to the pathways cohorts and the data was collected using a University Qualtrics.

The Lobby Days intervention took place on March 11-12, 2018. The PAS was distributed and collected in October of 2018. PAS consists of 20 questions and took between 5-10 minutes to complete. Professors of each on-campus cohort received emails during the last two weeks of September of 2018 to inquiring when was the best time to visit classes to administer the PAS without disrupting too much class time. An email was sent to an admissions assistant in the beginning of October to administer the PAS to the cohorts as soon as possible.

Protection of Human Subjects

The PAS that was given to MSW students at a University was completely anonymous. It did not ask for specific identifying information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, or emails. The only identifying information asked in the PAS will be students' cohort, their age, their gender, and their ethnic background. Along with the surveys, informed consent forms were also distributed to students to read and sign. The students had a right to refuse to take the PAS if they did not feel comfortable answering the questions or did not feel comfortable giving the identifying information mentioned.

Hard copy surveys were collected and stored in folders that was not accessible to others outside of this research project. Responses to electronic surveys from the University's Qualtrics System were also not accessible to others outside of this research project. The information from the hard copy and electronic surveys were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze data. Results and information found in the study were not published or accessible to others until after the research was finalized in June of 2019. Completed surveys were destroyed after this study was completed.

Data Analysis

After all surveys were collected, each survey was given a unique number which was noted as the participant ID number. Answers from each participant were entered into an excel spreadsheet. Data from the excel spreadsheet was then converted into an SPSS dataset. Pearson chi-square analyses were conducted using SPSS to compare the frequencies of each political activity among students that participated in Lobby Days and students that did not participate. Results from the analysis are presented in Chapter Four.

Summary

This study sought to find out if experiential learning opportunities, such as Lobby Days, make a significant impact on the levels of political engagement among MSW students. Due to the several different ways to define political engagement, this study used a quantitative approach with an instrument that

inquired about multiple forms of political activities, to determine the ways that

MSW students conducted political activities and to what extent. This type of data

sufficiently answered the question of this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The results from the PAS were quantitatively analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Descriptive statistics of the sample are provided including age, gender, ethnicity,

and participation in Lobby Days status. Additionally, counts and frequencies of

the political activity variables measured in the PAS are included in the descriptive

statistics section. The inferential analysis section shows the statistical tests used

to determine if social work students who participated in Lobby Days are more

politically engaged than those who did not. Pearson chi-square tests were

conducted to determine if there was a relationship between attending Lobby and

social work students' levels of political engagement. Results are presented

throughout the chapter and summarized in the chapter conclusion.

Study Sample

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample, including

the number participating in Lobby Days and the number in the control group. The

mean age of the sample was 29.81. Much of the sample was comprised of

women (84.2%), with more than half self-identifying as Latino/Hispanic (63.1%),

while a little more than a quarter of the sample was Caucasian/European

American (16.6%). A little more than half of the sample did not attend Lobby

Days (52.5%) while a little under half of the sample participated in Lobby Days

(47.5%).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

	N	%	M
Age	146		29.81
Gender			
Male	25	15.8	
Female	133	84.2	
Race Ethnicity			
Multi-Ethnic	11	7.0	
Latino/Hispanic	99	63.1	
African American	14	8.9	
Caucasian/European American	26	16.6	
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	3.8	
Middle Eastern	1	.6	
Participated in Lobby Days			
No	83	52.5	
Yes	75	47.5	

Note. Twelve participants did not report age; Two participants did not report ethnicity.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents voter registration among the sample. A majority of the

sample reported that they are currently registered to vote (88.5%). A small

number reported not knowing their voter registration or being not eligible to vote

(2.2%).

Table 2. Voter Registration

	N	%
Registered to Vote		
Yes	139	88.5
No	13	8.3
Don't Know	3	1.9
Not Eligible	2	1.3

Note. Six people did not report their voter registration status, did not know, or reported that they were not eligible to vote.

Table 3 displays the frequencies of students that vote in presidential elections. More than half of the sample reported voting all the time in presidential elections (57.5%), while almost a quarter of the sample reported voting in most presidential elections (22.6%), and only a small number reporting never voting in presidential elections (5.5%).

Table 3. Voting in Presidential Elections

	N	%
Vote in Presidential Elections		
All	84	57.5
Most	33	22.6
Some, Rarely	21	14.4
Never	8	5.5

Note. Twelve people did not report presidential voting, activity or disclosed being ineligible.

Table 4 shows the frequencies of students that vote in local elections. About a third of the sample reported voting in some or rarely in local elections (33.1%), while more than a quarter of the sample reported voting in all local

elections (27.2%), and almost a quarter of the sample reported never voting in

local elections (19.9%).

Table 4. Voting in Local Elections

	N	%
Vote in Local Elections		
All	41	27.2
Most	33	21.9
Some, Rarely	50	33.1
Never	27	19.9

Note. Seven people did not report local election voting activity
or disclosed being ineligible.

Students were asked about participation in any political campaigns,

displayed in Table 5. A majority of the sample reported not volunteering in

presidential campaigns (87.9%) with a few students reporting that they have

volunteered in political campaigns (12.1%).

Table 5. Volunteer in Political Campaigns

	N	%
Campaign Volunteer		
No	138	87.9
Yes	19	12.1

Note. One person did not disclose campaign
volunteer activity.

Table 6 presents the number of students who have contacted elected

officials via emails, letters, phone calls, or meetings. A majority of students

reported no contact with their legislators (63.9%) but over a third of the sample

reported that they have contacted their legislators (36.1%).

Table 6. Contacting Legislators

	N	%
Contact Legislators		
No	101	63.9
Yes	57	36.1

Table 7 displays the number of students that participated in any protest in the last twelve months. A little over half of the sample reported not engaging in any protests (57.6%) while just under half of the sample reported yes to engaging in protests (41.8%).

Table 7. Protest Activity

	N	%
Protest		
No	91	57.6
Yes	66	41.8

Table 8 shows the number of students that participate in service clubs. Most of the sample reported no participation in any service clubs (84.1%) with only a small number indicating involvement in service clubs (15.3%).

Table 8. Service Club Participation

	N	%
Service Clubs		
No	132	84.1
Yes	24	15.3

Table 9 presents the number of students that participate in service clubs and hold club officer positions. Most of those that reported participating in a

service club indicated that they hold an officer positions in service clubs (62.5%) with only a small number indicating that they do not hold officer positions (37.5%).

Table 9. Service Club Officer Participation

	N	%
Service Club Officer		
No	9	37.5
Yes	15	62.5

Table 10 displays the number of students that have given monetary donations to political campaigns or causes. Most of the sample reported not giving monetary donations to political campaigns or causes (77.7%) with almost a quarter of the sample reporting making monetary donations to political campaigns or causes (22.3%).

Table 10. Monetary Donations

	N	%
Monetary Donations		
No	122	77.7
Yes	35	22.3

Note. One person reported "do not know" when
Asked if he/she makes monetary contributions

Inferential Analysis

To determine if there was a relationship between Lobby Days participation and voter registration among social work students, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 11 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that

there is no significant difference in voter registration between social work

students who attended Lobby Days and those who did not (χ^2 = 1.83, p = .18).

Students that attend Lobby Days are not more likely to be registered to vote than

students who do participate in Lobby Days.

Table 11. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation
and Voter Registration

			Registered to Vote			
	Variable	N	No	Yes	χ^2	p
					1.83	.18
Participated in	No	78	9	69		
Lobby Days	Yes	74	4	70		
	Totals	152	13	139		

To find out if a relationship between Lobby Days participation and voting

participation for presidential elections exist, a chi-square analysis was conducted.

Table 12 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that there is no

significant difference in voting patterns in presidential elections between social

work students by Lobby Days participation (χ^2 = .51, p = .92). Students that

attend Lobby Days are not more likely to vote in presidential elections than

students who do participate in Lobby Days.

Table 12. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Voting in Presidential Elections

| | Variable | N | Vote in Presidential Elections | | | | χ^2 | p |
			All	Most	Some, Rarely	Never		
							.51	.92
Participated in Lobby Days	No	73	41	16	12	4		
	Yes	73	43	17	9	4		
	Totals	146	84	33	21	8		

Regarding voting participation in local elections, a chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship between Lobby Days participation and this domain of political engagement exists. Table 13 shows the Pearson chi-square results were not statistically significant but there is a trending difference in voting patterns for local elections among social work students who participate in Lobby Days (χ^2 = 2.81, p = .42). Students that attend Lobby Days tend to vote more in local elections than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 13. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and of Voting in Local Elections

| | Variable | N | Vote in Local Elections | | | | χ^2 | p |
			All	Most	Some, Rarely	Never		
							2.81	.42
Participated in Lobby Days	No	77	17	16	28	16		
	Yes	74	24	17	22	11		
	Totals	151	41	33	50	27		

Figure 1 shows a multiple bar graph that compares voting participation among students that did not attend Lobby Days and students who did attend Lobby Days.
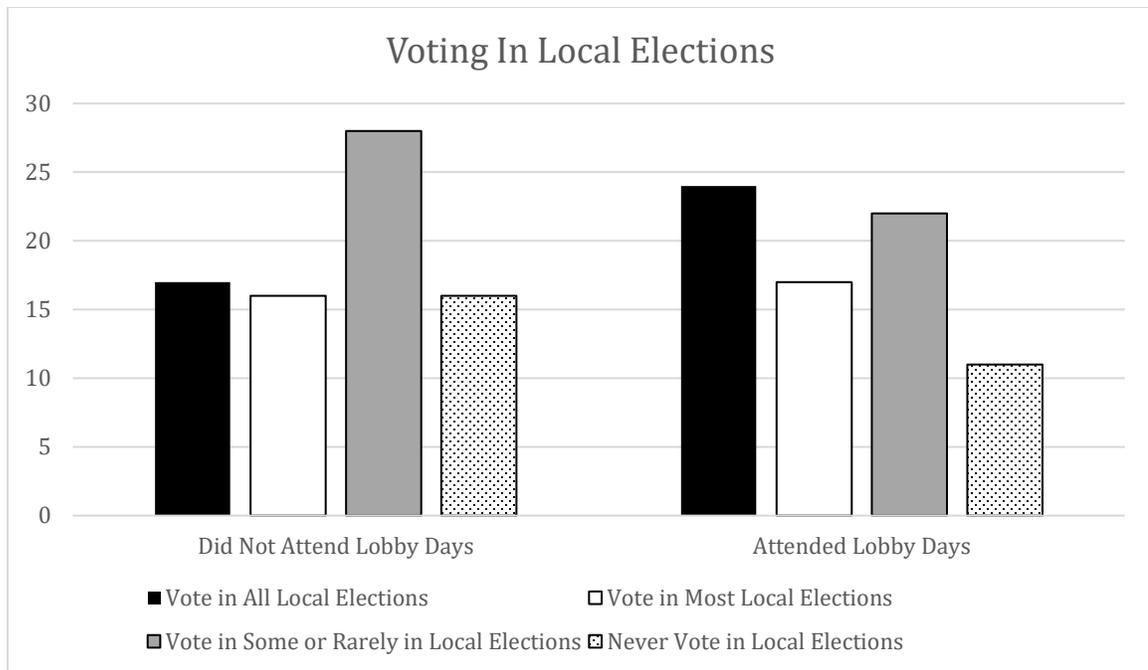
Figure 1. Voting in Local Elections

To test if there is relationship between Lobby Days and students' desire to volunteer on political campaigns, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 14 shows the Pearson chi-square results which indicates no significant difference in campaign volunteering among social work students who participate in Lobby Days ($\chi^2 = .28$, $p = .60$). Students that attend Lobby Days are not more likely to volunteer on a political campaign than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 14. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Campaign Volunteering

	Variable	N	Campaign Volunteer		χ^2	p
			No	Yes		
					.28	.60
Participated in	No	82	71	11		
Lobby Days	Yes	75	67	8		
	Totals	157	138	19		

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Regarding students that contact their legislators, a chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship between Lobby Days participation and contacting legislators. Table 15 shows the Pearson chi-square analysis that indicates a significant difference in students that contact their legislators among social work students determined by their Lobby Days participation ($\chi^2 = 8.80$, $p = <.01$). Students that attend Lobby Days are more likely to contact their legislators than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 15. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Contacting Legislators

	Variable	N	Contact Legislators		χ^2	p
			No	Yes		
					8.8	<.01
Participated in	No	83	62	21		
Lobby Days	Yes	75	39	36		
	Totals	158	101	57		

Figure 2 presents a multiple bar graph that compares students who contact their legislators among students that did not attend Lobby Days and students who did attend Lobby Days.
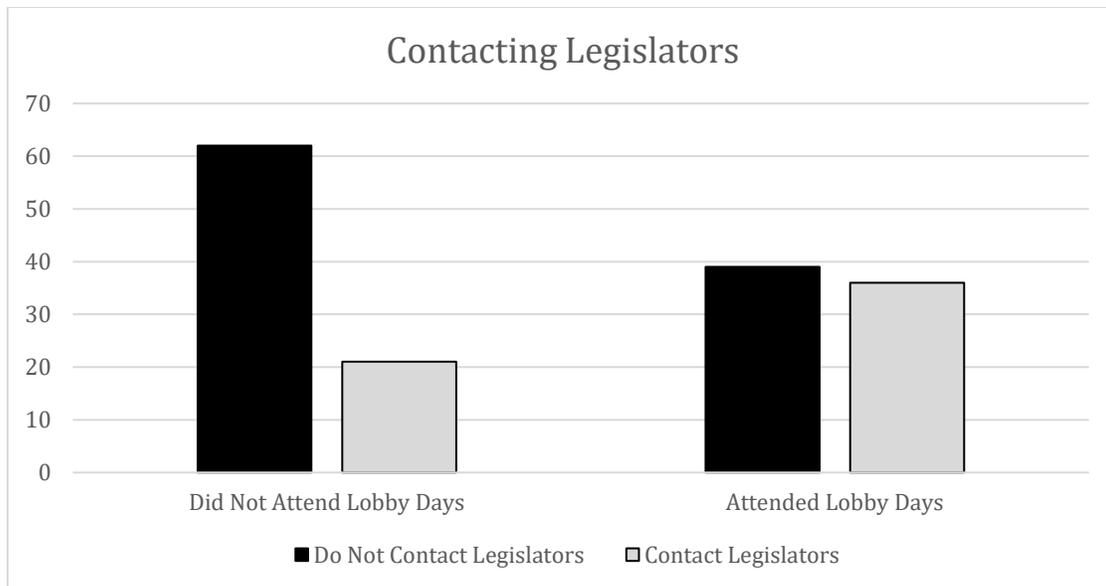
Figure 2. Contacting Legislators

To test if there was a relationship between Lobby Days participation and engagement in protest or social demonstration among social work students, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 16 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates a significant difference in protest and social demonstration participation among social work students determined by their Lobby Days participation (χ^2 = 23.26, *p* = <.01). Students that attend Lobby Days are more likely to participate in a protest or social demonstration than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 16. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Protesting

			Protest			
	Variable	N	No	Yes	χ^2	*p*
					23.26	<.01
Participated in	No	83	63	20		
Lobby Days	Yes	74	28	46		
	Totals	157	91	66		

30

Figure 3 displays a multiple bar graph that compares participation in protests or social demonstration within the past 12 months among students that did not attend Lobby Days and students who did attend Lobby Days.
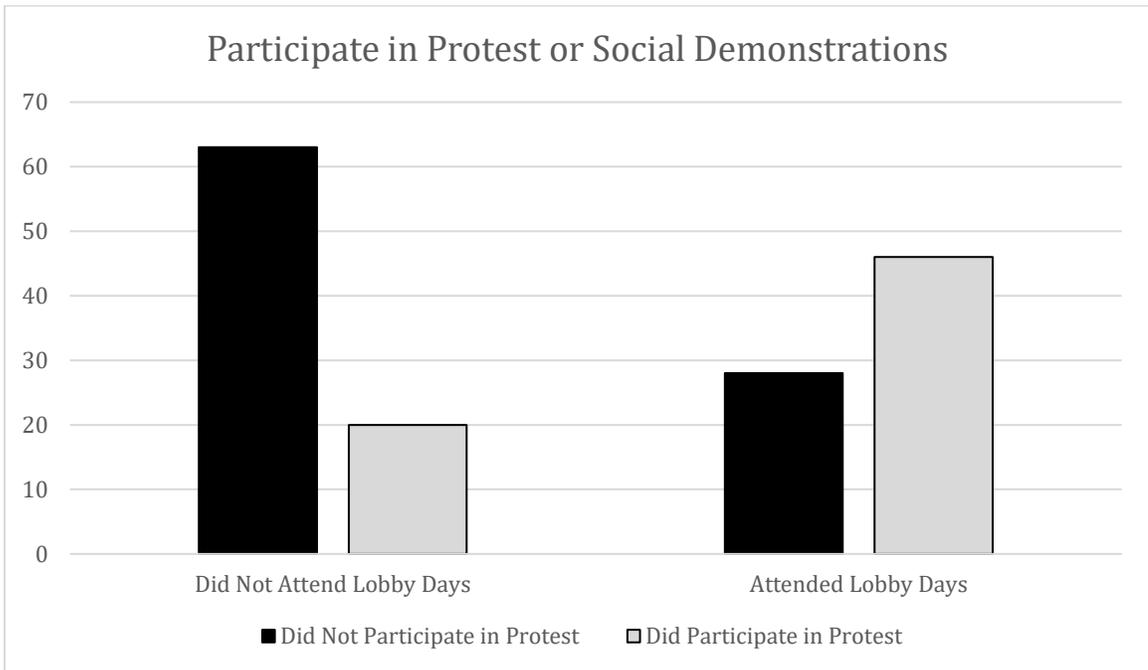
Figure 3. Participate in Protest or Social Demonstrations

To determine if there was a relationship between Lobby Days participation and service club participation, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 17 shows the Pearson chi-square results which indicates that there is a significant difference in voter service club participation among social work students determined by their Lobby Days participation ($\chi^2 = 6.58$, $p = .01$). Students that attend Lobby Days are more likely to participate in service clubs than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 17. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Service Club Participation

| | | | Service Club Participation | | | |
	Variable	N	No	Yes	χ^2	p
					6.58	.01
Participated in	No	83	76	7		
Lobby Days	Yes	73	56	17		
	Totals	156	132	24		

Figure 4 shows a multiple bar graph that compares participation in service clubs among students that did not attend Lobby Days and students who did attend Lobby Days.
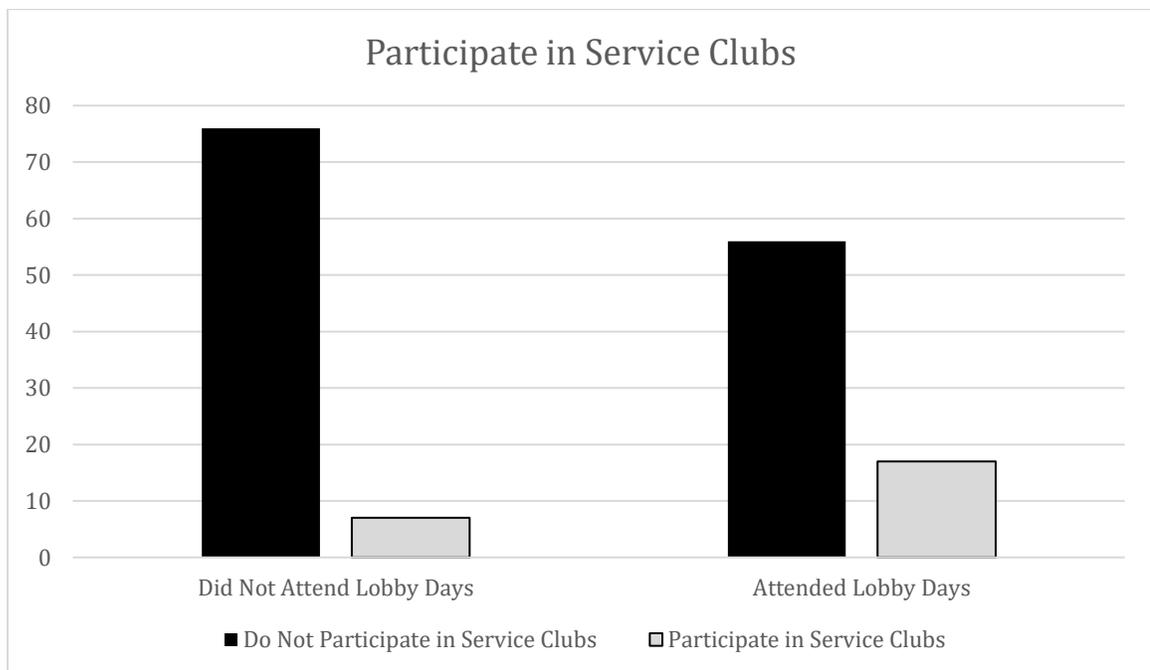

Figure 4. Participate in Service Clubs

To determine if there was a relationship between Lobby Days participation and students that participate in service clubs as a club officer, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 18 shows the Pearson chi-square results which

indicates that there is a trending difference in participation in service clubs as a club officer among social work students that participate in service clubs determined by their Lobby Days participation (χ^2 = .12, p = .73). Students that attend Lobby Days and are involved in social service clubs tend to more likely be a service club officer than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 18. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Service Club Officer Participation

	Variable	N	Service Club Officer Participation		χ^2	p
			No	Yes		
					.12	.73
Participated in	No	7	3	4		
Lobby Days	Yes	17	6	11		
	Totals	24	9	15		

Figure 5 presents a multiple bar graph that compares participation in service clubs as a service club officer among students that did not attend Lobby Days and students who did attend Lobby Days.
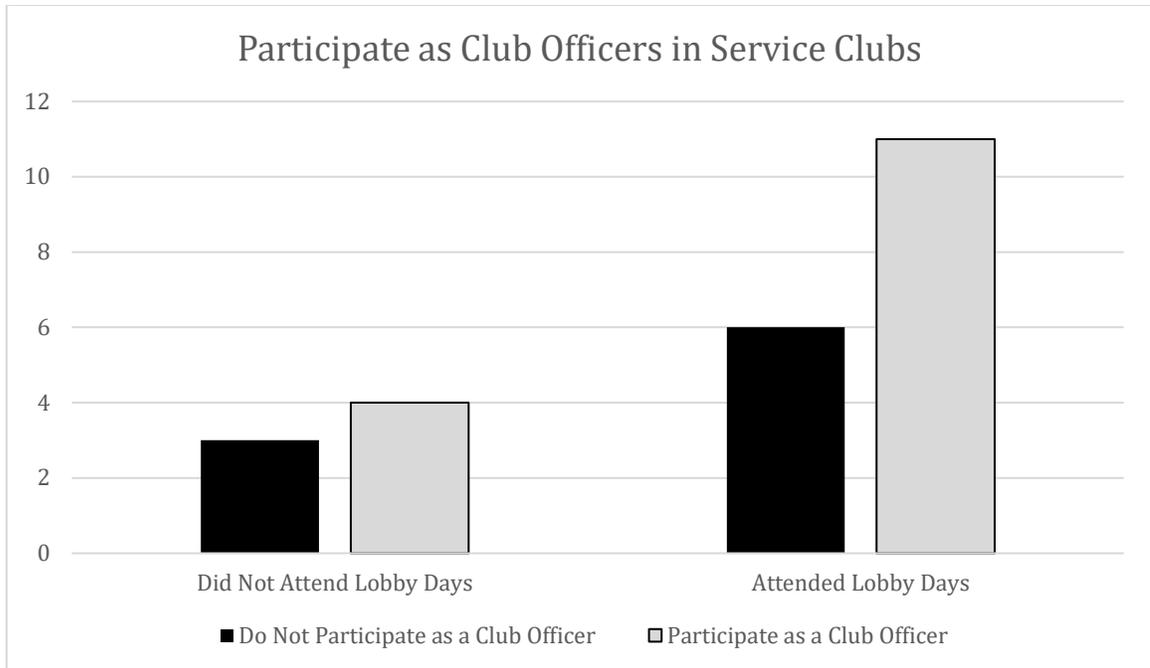
Figure 5. Participate as Club Officers in Service Clubs

To test if a relationship exists between Lobby Days participation and students that donate to political campaigns or causes, a chi-square analysis was conducted. Table 19 shows the Pearson chi-square results and indicates that there is no significant difference in students who give monetary donations to political campaigns or causes among social work students determined by their Lobby Days participation ($\chi^2 = .12$, $p = .73$). Students that attend Lobby Days are not more likely to give a monetary donation to a political cause or campaign than students who do not participate in Lobby Days.

Table 19. Chi-square Analysis of Relationship Between Lobby Days Participation and Monetary Donation

	Variable	N	Monetary Donation		χ^2	p
			No	Yes		
					1.81	.18
Participated in	No	83	68	15		
Lobby Days	Yes	74	54	20		
	Totals	157	122	35		

Summary

Statistical results of the study were presented in the chapter showing demographic characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity, and Lobby Days participation. Pearson chi-square tests were used to test if there is a relationship between Lobby Days participation and various activities of political engagement among social work students. Results show that Lobby Days participation is significantly related to the political engagement domains of voting in local elections, contacting legislators, participating in protests or social demonstrations, participating in service clubs, and participating in service clubs as club officers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss study findings, comparisons to existing literature, and implications for future social work practice. The purpose of this study was to examine if Lobby Days, as an experiential learning intervention, made a difference in levels of political engagement among social work students. This study came to conclusions based on PAS data collection among social work students from a University in Southern California. Results from the study suggest a significant difference in levels of political engagement among social work students that participate in Lobby Days.

Discussion

Policy education increases feelings of political competency which leads to an increase in political activity among students (Rocha et al. 2010). Experiential learning helps build a link between course content and practical experience (Anderson & Harris, 2005; Heidemann, 2011). Few studies have examined the impact of policy practice experiential learning interventions on social work students, making it unclear if this is an effective intervention to bridge the gap between social work students and policy practice.

The study results illustrate that Lobby Days can make a difference in the relationship of social work students' levels of political engagement. Results show that students who participate in Lobby Days were more likely to vote in local

elections, contact legislators, participate in protests or social demonstrations, participate in service clubs, and participate as service club officers than students who did not participate in Lobby Days. Studies by Felderhoff et al. (2016) define political engagement into categories of indirect political engagement, such as donating time, money, or effort such as voting, and direct political engagement, such as direct communication with legislators by attending meetings, working on political campaigns, attending demonstrations, making phone calls, or writing letters. By this definition, the study shows that Lobby Days can impact levels of both indirect and direct political engagement. Findings from the study point toward voting in local elections, engaging in service clubs, and holding an officer position in service clubs as indirect political engagement having a relationship from Lobby Days participation. Findings from the study also point toward contacting legislators and protesting as direct political engagement having a relationship from Lobby Days participation. These findings surmise a relationship between Lobby Days participation and well-rounded participation in political activities.

By considering the civic voluntarism model, the study results provide insight to social work students levels of political engagement as it relates to psychological engagement. The civic voluntarism model suggests that resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment are all contributing factors that lead individuals to political participation (Ritter, 2007). Psychological engagement in the context of the civic voluntarism model is defined by such things as political interest, political efficacy, and political information (Ritter, 2007). The results of

the study suggest that students who attend Lobby Days gain political interest, efficacy, and information as they show to have more engagement in a variety of political activities compared to students who did not participate in Lobby Days.

These findings align with research that supports that experiential learning methods enhance social work students' understanding in macro practice. Experiential learning helps to connect and apply content from the classroom to practical experience (Anderson & Harris, 2005; Heidemann, 2011). In addition, experiential learning can help to soften resistance to taking policy courses among social work students (Byers, 2014). Thus, this research supports these previous findings as it suggests Lobby Days, as an experiential learning tool, benefits students in strengthening their engagement in political activities.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had a large sample size from a university's social work student population. However, sampling students from only one school of social work serves as a limitation to this study as it was not reflective of the wide background of educational settings for social work students. Another limitation of this study was that this study did not look at a baseline of students' levels of political engagement before attending Lobby Days. Assessing the initial levels of political engagement of social work students before attending Lobby Days could provide more insight into what was gained from Lobby Days in terms of political engagement. Examining the levels of political engagement among social work students before attending Lobby Days could also help to rule out speculation of

those that are more likely to attend Lobby Days are already more politically engaged than those who chose to not participate.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

This study is important to the field of social work as engaging in policy practice is a duty called onto social workers by the NASW code of ethics. NASW code of ethics states that it is a responsibility of social workers to engage in social and political action that benefits vulnerable populations (NASW, 2017). The CSWE even includes engaging in policy practice into one of the core competencies of social work (CSWE, 2015). With these responsibilities and standards to social workers, it is important to properly prepare social work students during their education to handle policy practice on their own. Being able to conduct policy practice in the field of social work is important, not just to the social worker, but to the clients and vulnerable populations that social workers serve. Advocating for clients on the macro level through policy work, provides systems level change that can address systemic barriers that vulnerable populations face, making this impact one that cannot be done on the micro level.

Future social work research should sample multiple schools of social work to determine if Lobby Days is an effective experiential learning intervention to policy practice for all social work students. Establishing a baseline of political engagement levels with pre-testing and post-testing can better measure the effectiveness of Lobby Days in making students more politically engaged. Qualitative research can also explore specific themes of what social work

students gain from Lobby Days that relate to political efficacy. Understanding specific levels of political engagement along with themes of what students gain in terms of political efficacy can create better highlight benefits from Lobby Days as an experiential learning technique. Future research can also explore the resource dimension of the civic voluntarism model by assessing resources of students who participate in Lobby Days and students who do not participate in Lobby Days. This will evaluate any resource gaps that could potentially serve as a barrier to students that do not participate in Lobby Days which could help to support or create programs to allow social work students to attend Lobby Days.

Conclusions

This study sought out to determine if Lobby Days was an effective experiential learning policy practice intervention for social work students. The findings suggest that Lobby Days does make a significant difference in the relationship between students that attend Lobby Days and levels of political engagement. Study results were discussed in this chapter along with the strengths and limitations. Future studies can expand sampling to other schools of social work, assess baseline levels of political engagement, and use qualitative research to further explore the effects of Lobby Days. Policy practice is critical to the field of social work and using experiential learning strategies can enhance social work students understanding of how to engage in policy practice to better serve clients and vulnerable populations.

APPENDIX A

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES SURVEY

Political Activities Survey

Please respond to each question be checking one box or filling in the blank.

1. What is your gender?
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Other: Please specify _____

2. How old are you? _____

3. What is your ethnicity?
   - ☐ African American
   - ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
   - ☐ Caucasian/European American
   - ☐ Latino(a)/Hispanic
   - ☐ Native American
   - ☐ Prefer Not to Disclose
   - ☐ Other: Please specify _____

4. Which cohort are you in?
   - ☐ 1st Year Monday Wednesday Full Time
   - ☐ 2nd Year Monday Wednesday Full Time
   - ☐ 1st Year Tuesday Thursday Full Time
   - ☐ 2nd Year Tuesday Thursday Full Time
   - ☐ 1st Year Tuesday Thursday Part Time
   - ☐ 2nd Year Tuesday Thursday Part Time
   - ☐ 3rd Year Tuesday Thursday Part Time
   - ☐ 1st Year Pathways
   - ☐ 2nd Year Pathways
   - ☐ 3rd Year Pathways

5. Have you ever attended NASW Lobby Days?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

6. If no, please skip to question 10. If yes, did you ever attend an appointment with a legislator or a member of their staff? (participate as a lobbyist participant)
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

7. If no, please skip to question 10. If yes, how many times have you participated in NASW Lobby Days as a lobbyist participant?
   - ☐ Once
   - ☐ Twice
   - ☐ Three Times
   - ☐ Four Times

8. When was the last year you participated in NASW Lobby Days as a lobbyist participant? _____

9. Have you ever participated in NASW Lobby Days as a team leader?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

10. Are you currently registered to vote?
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ Not Eligible
   - ☐ Refuse to Answer
   - ☐ Don't Know

11. If yes, do you vote in presidential elections?
   - ☐ Never
   - ☐ Rarely
   - ☐ Some
   - ☐ Most
   - ☐ All
   - ☐ Not Eligible
   - ☐ Refuse to Answer
   - ☐ Don't Know

12. Do you vote in local elections? (i.e. State Senate, State Assembly, Mayor, City Council)
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Most
- ☐ All
- ☐ Not Eligible
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

13. Have you ever worked as a volunteer on a political campaign? (for no pay at all)
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

14. If yes, about how many hours per week were you active in the campaign? _____

15. In the past 12 months have you ever initiated contact with an elected official or someone on their staff? (calling, writing letters, writing emails)
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

16. In the past 12 months, have you ever taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

17. Are you a member of any service clubs or fraternal organizations such as Lions, Kiwanis, local women's clubs, or organizations at school?
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

18. If yes, how many organizations are you involved with? _____

19. Have you ever served on the board or as a club officer of an organization?
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

20. Have you ever contributed a monetary donation to a political candidate or to a political cause?
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Refuse to Answer
- ☐ Don't Know

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the levels of political engagement among California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) social work students. The study is being conducted by Sarah Wright, a graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at CSUSB. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine the levels of political engagement among Masters of Social Work students at CSUSB.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked a few questions of their participation in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Lobby Days event, voting participation, campaign work, political contact, protest activities, service club participation, and monetary donations to political organizations.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lizano at (909) 537- 5584.

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.

****

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

909.537.5501
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

The California State University · Bakersfield · Channel Islands · Chico · Dominguez Hills · East Bay · Fresno · Fullerton · Humboldt · Long Beach · Los Angeles Maritime Academy · Monterey Bay · Northridge · Pomona · Sacramento · San Bernardino · San Diego · San Francisco · San Jose · San Luis Obispo · San Marcos · Sonoma · Stanislaus

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