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Social Media:
An Essential Element of Blended MSW Programs

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1

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Program Overview

- Offer 2 hybrid programs:
  - Statewide Blended (80:20)
    - F2F – Summer Institute, monthly ITV sessions
  - Weekend (70:30)
    - F2F – Kick-Off, monthly weekend sessions
- Both programs are 3-years, part-time, year-round
- Typical student:
  - Nontraditional, many life demands, work FT/PT in the field, cannot attend traditional campus-based program

2

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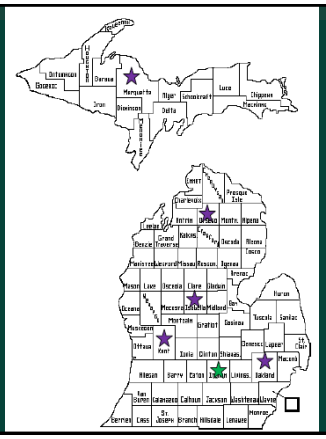

3

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Cohort Model

- Programs are lock-step
- Students must complete coursework according to schedule - each required course only offered 1x during 3 years of program
- Complete all required coursework together

4

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Team Building

- Main focus during 1st F2F meeting
  - Ice-breakers
  - Getting to know classmates
  - Group contracts
  - Discuss goals for the program & hopes for the future
  - Points of connection
  - Empathic learning

5

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Importance of the "Blend"

- Chose these programs for the "blend."
- Not fully online – F2F helps decrease isolation
- F2F provides a nice overview of what's to come until the next class session – opportunity to "check-in" with the instructor
- Promotes more communication (written & verbal)
- Provides an online "study group"
  - Students are reading, writing about and then discussing material
- But, is the "Blend" enough?

6

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Demographics

Total Responses: 84/144
58.3% response rate

Male: 14
Female: 70

Ages
- 21-30: 32
- 31-40: 27
- 41-50: 20
- 51-60: 6

- Weekend Program: 22
- Statewide Blended Advanced Standing Program: 18
- Statewide Blended Regular Program: 44

1st year: 26
2nd year: 31
3rd year: 25

7

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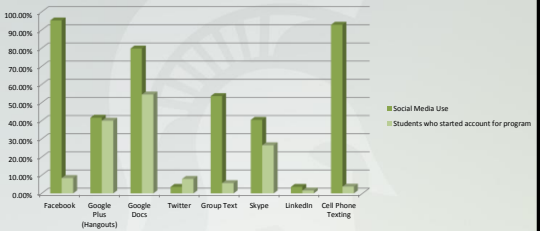
Social Media Usage



Facebook: 95%
Google Hangout: 41%
Cell Phone Texting: 92%
Google Docs: 79%
Skype: 40%
Linkedin: 3%

Additional responses: Voicethread, Celly, and Zoom

77% of students indicated social media connection lessened their level of stress!

8

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Academic Support

- Majority of students (67%) are connected to social media outlets between 1-5 hours a week for academic support.
- How are students utilizing social media for academic support?
  - Asking questions about coursework (97%)
  - Feedback on assignments (94%)
  - "Vent" about coursework (85%)
  - Plan face-to-face meeting (75%)
  - Licensure questions (70%)
  - Share social work related news (63%)
  - Additional responses: Group Projects
- Professors: office hours (required or voluntary, chat or Skype etc.)

9

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Personal Support

"Social media has been helpful in helping us communicate better as a cohort. It allows us to work out issues that others may not be clear on, and helps up stay on track. It has also been helpful with motivate one another when times are difficult."

- Life events

Though, there are many positive sides to social media use in distance education, there are some negatives:
- 24/7 awareness of colleague's accomplishments can harbor feelings of resentment.
- *"Getting 'sucked into' other's school related drama."*
- *"Classmates expressing frustrations can gain momentum by other classmates becoming frustrated."*

10

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Networking

Social media can solidify connection
- *"…social media helps new members feel like a part of the group quicker and allows for us to keep in contact with members who have left the learning community"*

Networking advantages
- **Twitter:** Remain up to date on national and local issues (ex. NASW)
- **Facebook:** Create agency/individual practice pages (ex. Ele's Place, Firecracker Foundation)
- **LinkedIn:** Career development and identifying multiple levels of connection (ex. similar field, tiered connections)
- **YouTube:** Viral videos stimulate conversation and ensures that education doesn't remain static

Does it really matter?
- Yes. Navigating social media and networks are crucial.
  - Remaining ethical by employing healthy online habits
  - Modernizing approach (ex. digital natives)
  - Grow by who you know: social capital

11

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Retention

Supportive results:
- Of 84 current students, 81 (96.4%) **agreed or strongly agreed** that social media has **positively** impacted their learning experience.
- Using the same sample, 65 (77.4%) students reported having **lessened or significantly lessened** their stress levels **through their use of social media**.

Social Media and Retention
- Builds a bridge to the University Community
  - Normalizes experiences and validates similar concerns amongst a larger entity
- Stress Reduction
  - Enables students to succeed and associate positive feelings towards colleagues and program

Administrative Role
- Encourage the use of social media
  - Employ training on setting up and utilizing different forms of social media
- Leave it student driven
  - Overwhelmingly, students preferred that administration take a back seat role

12

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Student Comments

- *"I think social media is imperative to help students feel connected."*
- *"Social media has assisted in feeling closer and connected to classmates who are really very far away in proximity. It is nice to have a sounding board, and a place to gain and share information as needed with peers."*
- *"Social media has been a large part of my graduate education. My learning community uses this resource to ask questions, organize face-to-face meetings, brainstorm for course assignments and to continually support one another through personal and academic struggles."*

13