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Abstract

Human Services students close to graduation are seeking employment in the field, but many are also considering their future career paths and the training needed to reach their long-term career goals. Knowing if bachelor's level students desire graduate degrees, which focus they prefer, and how they would like to pursue the degrees may contribute to the decision-making of educators, employers, and students. This exploratory study, therefore, examined human services students' preferences for master's level training. Students' responses reflected preferences for several types of master's programs, direct acceptance, and online delivery. These themes and their implications for educators, employers, and students are discussed.

Introduction

Many human services (HMSV) students close to graduation are not only seeking employment in the field but are also considering their future career paths and the training needed to reach their long-term professional goals. Traditionally, for many in human services, their educational training moved from a certificate, to an associate's degree, to a bachelor's degree (Neukrug, 2017). In recent years, training has expanded with colleges now offering master's and doctoral programs in HMSV. Human services career opportunities and education options have grown due in part to the profession's expanded viability. It has become solid enough, that recent research, has called for human services to establish its own code within the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (Sparkman-Key & Neukrug, 2016). The need for qualified human services professionals has developed in response to current challenges in the world, and each additional degree opens up new, meaningful opportunities for work that can engage them in different ways of helping others.

HMSV Degree Descriptions

At each degree level, human services professionals are prepared for different levels of service delivery. According to the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE, 2013, a, b, c), those with associate's degrees are prepared to address the needs of individuals and groups through case management, intake interviews, counseling, use of resources and referrals, and consultation. HMSV students with associate's degrees may also seek further certifications, such as the Human Services Board Certified Practitioner credential or the Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor credential. Those at the bachelor's level meet all of the standards for the associate's degree, as well as obtain skills in program evaluation, systems theory, and advocacy. They also learn to take on administrative roles as human services professionals. Individuals pursuing master's degrees in human services meet all of the standards of the associate's and bachelor's degrees and are prepared to engage in human services research and evaluation. Doctoral degree programs prepare students to become human services educators.

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Graduate Degree Programming

Logically, students seek graduate level training that will position them for better employment options and allow them to quickly advance in their chosen fields. Despite the expansion of the human services field, master's degree programs in other helping fields remain far more prevalent. Based on a web search, 36 master's programs and five doctoral programs in human services were found to exist in the U.S. at this time. There are no accredited human services master's or doctoral programs (CSHSE, 2017). Considering there are few graduate programs to choose from, and none are accredited, bachelor's level HMSV students may pursue master's degrees in social work or various counseling disciplines as opposed to human services graduate degrees, based on their greater availability. However, these related programs do offer HMSV students beneficial career opportunities. A master's in social work allows graduates to work with individuals, families, and groups to optimize their functioning and promote community health (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). There are several different master's in counseling programs that students may pursue. For example, clinical mental health counseling programs prepare skilled professionals eligible for licensure who provide therapy to individuals, groups, couples, and families (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2015). Individuals with a master's degree in school counseling work with children and adolescents providing individual and group counseling in the school setting to promote academic achievement. A master's in college counseling allows graduates to work with students in higher education settings. Rehabilitation counselors are licensed professionals working with individuals who have social and vocational difficulties resulting from various disabilities. Addictions counselors are prepared to address individuals' problems with substance use and abuse, as well as with other addictive behaviors including gambling, eating, video game playing, etc. They utilize individual, group, and family counseling intervention and prevention.

Other graduate programs of interest to students with a bachelor's degree in human services may include marriage and family therapy, and integrated care. Those with a master's degree in marriage and family therapy address dysfunction within the family system (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2017). With a master's in integrated care, professionals manage and organize services related to diagnosis, treatment, care, rehabilitation and health promotion for individuals, typically within large systems, such as hospitals (International Foundation for Integrated Care [IFIC], 2017). With a wide range of graduate degree options for bachelor's level human services students to pursue, it is of value to understand what they are most drawn to as a means to assist in adequate advisement and program development for students and educators, and position development for employers.

However, no prior research has investigated bachelor's level HMSV students' graduate degree seeking choices. This study focused on the perspectives of current students who had yet to complete their bachelor's training but were considering next steps and picturing what training they planned to pursue to enhance their careers. Information garnered from this study could guide future students in their decisions, empower employers by recognizing employees' long-term goals, and clarify what types of master's degrees colleges and universities should consider developing, as well as the modality in which they should offer them.

This preliminary, exploratory survey study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the desires of current students in a Bachelor of Science program in HMSV as they considered their future career directions and needs. It is important for the profession of HMSV to know if bachelor's level students want graduate degrees, and if so, what fields they desire them in, and

how they want to pursue them. This study therefore, explored students' perspectives on what types of degrees they would like to pursue beyond their bachelor's degree, and what type of admissions and course delivery might facilitate their pursuit of this higher level of training.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students ($N = 238$) majoring in a Bachelor of Science program in human services at a large metropolitan institution located in the southeastern United States. All percentages are reported to the 10th of a percent. When a participant opted not to respond to an item on the survey, the percentages were calculated without their information. This is noted in the reporting of the data. Of the participants, 214 were female (89.9%), 24 were male (10.1%), and none were transgender. Self-reported race/ethnicity included 117 (49.2%) White, 94 (39.5%) Black, 10 (4.2%) Bi-racial/Multi-racial, 6 (2.5%) Latino/a, 5 (2.1%) other, 3 (1.3%) Native American, and 2 (.8%) Asian individuals. One participant opted not to respond to this item. Participants' age ranged from 18 years old to just over 60, with most students ($n = 105$; 44.1%) between 21-30 years of age. The remaining included 58 (24.4%) between 31-40 years old, 28 (11.8%) between 51-60, 26 (10.9%) under 20, 19 (8.0%) between 41-50, and 2 (.8%) 60 years of age or older. The majority of participants reported no special needs ($n = 216$; 90.8%), while the remaining students ($n = 21$; 9.2%) reported physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. One participant opted not to respond to this item. Of the total sample, 59 (24.8%) reported some type of military status including 27 (11.3%) veterans, 27 (11.3%) military dependents, 3 (1.3%) disabled veterans, and 2 (.8%) active duty reservists.

Related to their experiences as undergraduate human services majors, the majority of participants ($n = 156$; 65.5%) identified as seniors in their final year of their bachelor's degree program. Juniors accounted for 66 (27.7%) of the participants, while 12 (5.0%) identified as sophomores and 2 (.8%) as freshmen. Two participants opted not to respond to this item. Most participants were completing their courses online ($n = 132$; 55.5%). Face-to-face courses were completed by 23.5% ($n = 56$) of the participants, while 21.0% ($n = 50$) opted for a combination of both online and face-to-face. Most participants also identified as full time students ($n = 182$; 76.5%), with the remaining 23.1% ($n = 55$) attending part time. One participant opted not to respond to this item. The respondents consisted primarily of non-traditional transfer students ($n = 135$; 56.7%). These students attended community college at some point after high school, and transferred into the four-year institution at some time after completing an associate's degree, but with a substantial amount of work and life experience as well. Traditional students, who entered the four-year institution as freshmen immediately following high school, accounted for 24.4% ($n = 58$) of the participants. A smaller portion of the respondents reported being traditional transfer students ($n = 34$; 14.3%) who attended community college from high school and transferred directly into the four-year institution upon completion of an associate's degree, or non-traditional students ($n = 10$; 4.2%) who entered the four-year institution after years out of high school. One participant opted not to respond to this item. First generation college students accounted for 52.5% ($n = 125$) of the participants, and 74.8% ($n = 178$) worked while attending school.

Procedures

Data collected for the current study was obtained through a researcher-developed survey that included consent, demographics, and applicable questions about students' future training interests. Items were developed through a review of current graduate education options in the

mental health and social services fields, as well as through consultation with faculty in the researchers' undergraduate human services program and the department Chair and college Dean from the researchers' institution. Once the survey was developed, it was piloted on one class of 24 human services students taught by the second author. Based on feedback from these students, modifications were made to the survey that included clarifying the study's purpose, shortening the definitions provided of the various graduate programs, adding an item related to military status, and correcting two grammatical errors.

After approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, the survey was created in the university's electronic survey system, Qualtrics. A link to the Qualtrics survey was embedded into an email that addressed consent and briefly explained the purpose of the study. Participants were contacted through the human services program's email list serve. All registered human services undergraduate majors were contacted about participating in the study via this email ($N = 860$). Students who were interested were able to click a link and were taken to the survey that opened with an informed consent page that needed to be agreed to prior to starting the survey. All information collected on the Qualtrics instrument was de-identified and stored on a secure server. Ultimately, 238 students participated for a response rate of 28%.

Survey

The survey contained 30 questions including demographics pertaining to student status (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior), gender, ethnicity/race, and age. It asked about several further statuses including military, first generation third college student, special needs, attendance (full or part time), and work status. Additionally, participants were asked to specify the primary modality used to take their human services courses: online, face-to-face, or a combination of both. The questionnaire provided definitions of several types of master's degrees including: mental health counseling, school counseling, college counseling, marriage and family therapy, addictions counseling, rehabilitation counseling, human services, social work, and integrated care. It asked if participants desired to pursue a master's degree, which they would prefer to pursue, and which would be their second choice. The survey also asked if participants would be more likely to pursue a master's degree if they were granted direct admittance into the graduate program based on meeting minimum entrance criteria. Finally, the survey asked students to specify their preference for graduate program delivery: online, face-to-face, or a combination.

Data Analysis

The research design of this preliminary, exploratory survey study was non-experimental, single-variable. Descriptive statistics and frequency reports were run on the demographic data. The Chi-Square Test of Independence, also called Pearson's Chi-Square Test or the Chi-Square Test of Association, was used to discover if there were relationships between the categorical variables. This was appropriate because all of the data was nominal, and each variable consisted of two or more categorical, independent groups. The study was exploratory, so no hypotheses were proposed. Its purpose was to answer the following questions: Do undergraduate human services students desire to obtain a master's degree? What master's degree programs do undergraduate human services majors prefer? In which modality (online, face-to-face, or combination) do undergraduate human services majors prefer to complete a master's degree? Are there relationships between demographic variables and undergraduate human services students' preferences for master's degree programs? Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Results

        For this sample, almost all students ($n = 223$; 93.7%) intended to pursue a master's degree at some point in their futures, with only a small number ($n = 15$; 6.3%) not considering it. All students who indicated they would pursue a master's degree in the future ($n = 223$) indicated that they would definitely ($n = 181$; 81.2%), or possibly ($n = 42$; 18.8%) choose a program option in which they could automatically obtain admittance to a master's program from the human services bachelor's degree program by meeting specific GPA and professional experience requirements at the undergraduate level. The majority of students also indicated that they would be more likely to pursue their master's degree if they could complete it online ($n = 190$; 85.2%). However, a slightly smaller proportion ($n = 145$, 78.0%) indicated they prefer an online format to face-to-face.

Type of Degree

        Of the 223 interested in pursuing a graduate degree, 200 (84.0%) specified that they would be interested in one described on the survey, including mental health counseling, school counseling, college counseling, marriage and family therapy, addictions counseling, rehabilitation counseling, human services, social work, and integrated care. Thirteen (5.5%) participants indicated that they would pursue a different master's degree from those specified, including business administration ($n = 2$), higher education ($n = 1$), leadership ($n = 1$), art therapy ($n = 1$), funeral services/mortician ($n = 1$), public health ($n = 1$), quality assurance ($n = 1$), occupational therapy ($n = 1$), occupational and technical studies ($n = 1$), juvenile justice ($n = 1$), and gerontology ($n = 1$). One individual did not specify a different type of degree, and 10 participants did not respond to this item.

        Pertaining to the type of master's degree program preferred from those described on the survey, 26.0% ($n = 58$) indicated a preference for social work. This was the most preferred master's degree program by a 10% margin. The next most frequently selected master's program was human services ($n = 36$; 16.1%). Closely following was school counseling at 14.8% ($n = 33$). Equally preferred at 11.2% were mental health counseling ($n = 25$) and marriage and family therapy ($n = 25$). Addictions counseling was most preferred by 24 respondents (10.8%). College counseling, rehabilitation counseling and integrated care were least preferred at 5.4% ($n = 12$), 3.6% ($n = 8$), and .9% ($n = 2$) respectively. When asked to select a second choice, the following were chosen in order of preference: social work ($n = 43$; 19.3%), human services ($n = 40$; 17.9%), mental health counseling and marriage and family counseling ($n = 30$; 13.5% each), addictions counseling ($n = 21$; 9.4%), rehabilitation counseling ($n = 20$; 9.0%), college counseling ($n = 17$; 7.6%), school counseling ($n = 16$; 7.2%), and integrated care ($n = 6$; 2.7%).

Associations with Demographics

        Relationships between several variables were explored. A non-significant relationship was found between gender and participants' intention to pursue a master's degree at some point in their future $X^2(2, N = 223) = 1.795$, $p = .180$. Further, Phi effect size value ($\varphi = .087$) suggested a weak association between the variables. Neither was there a significant relationship between age and intent to pursue a master's degree $X^2(2, N = 223) = 9.072$, $p = .106$. The Phi effect size value ($\varphi = .195$) suggested a weak association between these variables as well. Likewise, one's race/ethnicity was not significantly related to participants' desire to obtain a master's degree in the future $X^2(2, N = 223) = 1.837$, $p = .934$. The Phi effect size value ($\varphi = .088$) also suggested a weak association between these variables. There was no significant

relationship between being a first generation college student and intent to pursue a master's degree $X^2(2, N = 223) = .004$, $p = .948$. The Phi effect size value ($\varphi = -.004$) suggested a weak association between these variables as well. Finally, no significant relationship was found between participants' work status: full or part time $X^2(2, N = 223) = .004$, $p = .952$. The Phi effect size value ($\varphi = -.005$) suggested a weak association between these variables too. The majority of participants intend to pursue a master's degree in the future regardless of how they identify.

With regard to the type of master's degree participants were interested in pursuing, there were significant differences between males and females $X^2(2, N = 223) = 26.174$, $p = .001$. The association between gender and type of master's degree participants were interested in pursuing was moderate ($\varphi = .343$). However, due to the disparity in sample sizes (24 males and 214 females), these results should be considered with caution. For both males and females, few if any were interested in pursuing a master's in integrated care (0.0% and 1.0% respectively). Males and females were comparably interested in pursuing a marriage and family therapy degree (12.5% and 11.1% respectively). Likewise, males and females were similarly interested in pursuing mental health counseling (16.7% and 10.6% respectively) and rehabilitation counseling (8.3% and 3.0% respectively). Differences emerged with the remaining degrees. While no males were interested in pursuing school counseling, 16.6% of females wished to pursue this degree. Males (12.5%) were more interested in college counseling than were females (4.5%). Likewise, males (33.3%) were substantially more interested in addictions counseling than were females (8.0%). Conversely, females were far more interested than males in pursuing both social work (28.1% and 8.3% respectively) and human services (17.1% and 8.3% respectively).

While there was no significant relationship and a moderate association between preferred type of master's degree to pursue and participants' race/ethnicity $X^2(2, N = 223) = 45.004$, $p = .596$, $\varphi = .450$, there was a significant relationship with regard to age $X^2(2, N = 223) = 80.758$, $p = .000$. The Phi effect size value ($\varphi = .602$) suggested a strong association between age and preferred type of master's degree to pursue. The two individuals who were 60 or older indicated a preference for a human services master's degree (100%), while the majority (64%) of the 23 participants between the ages of 51-60 desired a graduate degree in addictions (41.7%) or human services (21.7%). The other degree options were either selected by one participant each (school counseling and college counseling), two participants each (marriage and family therapy, rehabilitation counseling, and social work), or no participants (mental health counseling and integrated care). The 18 participants between 41 and 50 were more diverse in their selections. School counseling was selected by five (27.8%), social work was selected by four (22.2%), marriage and family therapy and addictions counseling were both selected by three (16.7%), mental health counseling was selected by 2 (11.1%), integrated care was selected by one (5.6%), and no one selected college counseling, rehabilitation counseling, or human services. Those between 31 and 40 years of age ($n = 56$) were most interested in human services ($n = 16$; 28.6%) and social work ($n = 11$; 19.6%). None were interested in integrated care, but seven selected marriage and family therapy (12.5%), six each selected mental health counseling (10.7%) and school counseling (10.7%), five selected addictions counseling (8.9%), three selected college counseling (5.4%), and two selected rehabilitation counseling (3.6%). The largest category of participants fell between the age range of 21-30. The 98 respondents preferred social work (28.6%) and school counseling (18.4%) for graduate degrees. Mental health counseling (14.3%) was the next most frequently selected degree, closely followed by human services (12.2%). Marriage and family therapy was selected by 9.2%, while college counseling and addictions

counseling were both selected by 6.1% of participants. Rehabilitation counseling was selected by 4.1% of respondents, and integrated care by 1.0%. The 26 participants between 18 and 20 were most interested in a master's in social work (50.0%). None selected integrated care, rehabilitation counseling, or addictions counseling. Marriage and family therapy was selected by four (15.4%), while mental health counseling and school counseling were both selected by three individuals (11.5%). Two (7.7%) participants selected college counseling. A master's degree in human services was only selected by one (3.8%) participant.

There was also a significant relationship between type of graduate program selected and whether or not one identified as a first generation college student X^2(2, N = 223) = 15.758, *p* = .046. However, the Phi effect size value (φ = .266) suggested a weak association between these variables. First generation students and non-first generation students selected the following at a similar rate: social work (27.4% & 24.5% respectively), school counseling (13.7% & 16.0%), mental health counseling (10.3% & 12.3%), college counseling (6.8% & 3.8%), and integrated care (.9% & .9%). Differences were evidenced between first generation college students and those who are not with regard to the following: human services (12.0% & 20.8%), rehabilitation counseling (6.0% & .9%), marriage and family therapy (7.7% & 15.1%), and addictions counseling (15.4% & 5.7%).

A significant relationship was found between current format in which participants were completing their courses, and likelihood of pursuing a master's degree if offered online. Those currently completing their bachelor's degree solely online, or with a combination of online and face-to-face courses, were significantly more likely to pursue a graduate degree if it were available online than those currently completing courses face-to-face X^2(2, N = 223) = 61.877, *p* = .000. The Phi effect size value (φ = .527) suggested a strong association between these variables. It is important to note that a far greater percentage of students completing their undergraduate studies solely online (98.4%), or through a combination of online and face-to-face (88.4%), indicated that they would be more likely to pursue their master's if offered online. However, over half (53.6%) of those who were strictly completing their courses face-to-face also indicated that they would be more likely to pursue their master's if offered online. While this percentage was significantly lower, it still accounted for over half of that population. Overall, it appears that students would prefer the convenience of online instruction when considering their preference for instructional format.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are several limitations regarding the results of this study. First, the sample was drawn from a single metropolitan state university's HMSV undergraduate program with only master's programs in counseling offered by the university. Furthermore, the study represents only the perspectives of those students who self-selected to participate. Moreover, there were disparities in the sample sizes when disaggregating some of the demographic data. As such, caution should be taken with regard to interpreting the results when making comparisons between groups. The results are not generalizable, but only represent the first steps in understanding HMSV students' experiences and preferences when considering future career directions.

Additionally, this was survey research to obtain information, but no formal psychometric instrument was used. Several dichotomous questions were included on the survey. These items were primarily used to simplify the survey experience for respondents and increase survey

completion rates, but they may have failed to capture the extent of respondents' experiences of the various programming formats.

Future research should diversify sampling by using students from several universities, programs and settings. Future research should also seek to expand the number of students assessed. It should also examine the reasons why students are considering a master's degree, as well as their reasons for preferring certain programs such as social work over counseling, or counseling over human services, or online versus face-to-face. In addition, it would be helpful to track the types of master's level training HMSV students actually pursue after graduation, why they chose their field, their starting salaries, and occupational satisfaction. This information could help clarify motivations that may assist future students as they consider types of master's programs to pursue. It could also assist employers as they consider positions to create and fill within agencies. Finally, it could assist educators as they consider types of graduate programs to offer. It would also be helpful to explore the primary employers of bachelor's level HMSV graduates to determine which types of degrees they prefer for advancement and increased responsibility.

Discussion

Results indicate a significant interest in pursuing master's level education amongst this sample of human services bachelor's level students. Over 94% of students who responded indicated this desire. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in desire to pursue graduate education based on demographic variables. Students, regardless of how they identified, appear to be planning to pursue educational training beyond the bachelor's, and seem to view their bachelor's degree as a step in their educational training, but not the end of it. This appears to indicate that these students view additional education as a means to gain something, be it greater responsibilities, opportunities, specialization and/or financial security (U.S. News & World Report, 2017).

It may be surprising to realize that so many of these students expect the need for master's level training in order to enhance their careers and lives. In the Current Population Survey addressing educational attainment, the U.S. Census Bureau (2016) revealed that the attainment of master's degrees has been steadily increasing, with 16.5% of those surveyed having a master's degree in 2015 compared to 12.5% in 2009. This is believed to be due to the chance to earn higher wages, although entry-level positions in more fields now require a master's degree (Torpey & Terrell, 2015). With regard to the mental health and social service fields in particular, graduate degrees tend to be even more important for career success and financial solvency; the wage premium between bachelor's and master's degrees in these fields ranges from $13,000 to $20,000 (Torpey & Terrell, 2015). Based on this data, it is no surprise that the undergraduate human services students in our study overwhelmingly plan to pursue graduate degrees.

However, whether or not they actually pursue graduate degrees based on their interest to do so is yet to be seen. To make their interest a reality, students may need to plan for more time and money to pursue graduate level education as a means to be competitive in the job market. Higher education is a costly endeavor, with the mean debt having risen from approximately $40,000 in 2004 to almost $60,000 in 2012 (U.S. News and World Report, 2017). It also calls for students to perform at a high level in their undergraduate studies and on the Graduate Record Exam, as high scores are often needed for graduate school admittance and success (Kjelgaard & Guarino, 2012; Kuncel, Wee, Serafin, & Hezlett, 2010; Briihl & Wasieleski, 2004; Schmidt, Homeyer, & Walker, 2009; Smaby et al 2005).

Further, if more students turn their interest to pursue graduate education into the actual obtaining of master's degrees, mental health agency employers may need to meet their service needs through the creation of positions for applicants with graduate degrees as opposed to bachelor's or associate's degrees. This means they will also need to be prepared to pay higher salaries (U.S. News and World Report, 2017). If they do not wish to employ individuals with graduate degrees, they may need to put greater effort into recruiting students while still in their associate's or bachelor's degree programs. Institutions of higher education also benefit from an awareness of the plans of undergraduate human services students with regard to graduate degrees. Offering graduate degree programs of interest to undergraduate human services students could be a lucrative endeavor for institutions, as so many of these students intend to continue their education.

In addition, based on the results, it appears clear that allowing for direct admittance into a master's program from a bachelor's program would increase the chances that a student would pursue that master's program. This option is becoming increasingly more popular and is offered at institutions all over the country including Boston University, Portland State University, Florida Atlantic University, and the University of Texas, to name a few. A combination of grade point average and life/work experience make up the typical components of this admissions option. Many institutions that offer this option eliminate the need for submitting the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores and essays. Providing such an option for undergraduate students completing their degrees in human services may increase the number of students likely to enroll in the same college's master's level programs. Master's level programs seeking to enhance quality student enrollment would do well to develop direct admittance programs to encourage undergraduate students to perform at a high academic level and secure a program seat without having to go through the traditional lengthy application processes.

Along with direct admittance, the present study's results indicate that institutions and students would benefit from master's degree programs being offered online. A large majority of the participants in the current study indicated that they would be more likely to pursue their master's degree if they could complete it online. This finding included students who were taking their undergraduate courses only in the traditional face-to-face format. Even when they prefer the face-to-face format, they indicated that they would be more likely to pursue a master's degree if it were offered online. Offering the program online appears to provide individuals with the flexibility and convenience needed to pursue a master's degree while balancing the commitments and responsibilities of their work and life. This finding is consistent with reasons given for taking online courses in human services (Rehfuss, Kirk-Jenkins, & Milliken, 2015) and in other academic fields, and points towards one of the reasons for online learning's growth (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Chandras & Chandras, 2010; Burt et al, 2011; Blackmon, 2013; Tsokris, 2011). Master's level graduate programs may benefit from offering or developing online programs in addition to face-to-face programs in order to meet the needs of future students.

Human services students in the current study were interested in pursuing a variety of graduate degree programs, though the majority selected social work and human services. These two professions were selected as the top second choices as well. This might be due to greater awareness or exposure to these professions. As current students of human services, professional opportunities, including continued education in the field, are inherently taught throughout the baccalaureate degree program in courses including introduction to human services and professional issues, to internship (CSHSE, 2013b). Related fields are also discussed, thus exposure to mental health professions such as social work and counseling. Since social work has

been in existence longer and requires master's level training for licensure and practice, it makes sense that human services students see the added benefit of such a degree and training. Social work degree programs have been recognized since the 1920s (Wieler, 2009), while master's in human services programs have only been offered since the latter part of the 20th century (Fullerton, 1990). Furthermore, master's in social work programs are offered extensively throughout the country with approximately 267 accredited programs for students to choose from (Council on Social Work Education, 2017). On the other hand, since master's degrees in HMSV are relatively new, there are far fewer programs available throughout the country. Currently, there are no accredited master's programs in human services according to the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (2017). There is value for institutions of higher education in noting the interest current undergraduate students of human services have in pursuing human services master's degrees. In addition to providing a desired field of study to its students, offering a master's in human services, particularly with direct admittance and online, may be a wise economic decision for these institutions.

   With regard to other mental health fields addressed in the current study, following social work and human services, participants expressed interest in school counseling, mental health counseling, marriage and family therapy, and addictions counseling. There was relatively equal interest in these counseling-focused degree programs, and combined, their numbers were greater than either social work or human services alone. This may be due to the field of counseling and these related specialty areas being well established and more familiar to the general public. Counseling has been an established field since the early 1900s (Gladding, 2013). Mental health counseling has been established since the 1910s, school counseling since the 1950s, marriage and family therapy since the 1960s, and addictions counseling since the 1960s. Furthermore, most students interacted with school counselors while in k-12 education since they are mandated in public education settings in most states (American School Counselor Association, 2017). Many may have also either participated in their own mental health counseling, or know friends and family who have. Even if individuals don't have direct experience with marriage and family therapy or addictions counseling, it is highly publicized in the media, either through representation in movies or through advertisements (Thomason, 2013). This public awareness of these mental health professions may make them seem viable as degree programs to pursue.

   On the other hand, college counseling, rehabilitation counseling, and integrated care were selected by far fewer participants. While college counseling and rehabilitation counseling are quite well established (college counseling since the 1980s and rehabilitation counseling since the 1950s [Gladding, 2013]), integrated care is a far newer profession with graduate degree programs only being offered since the early 2000s (IFIC, 2017). These professions seem less publicized in the media as well. College students meet with advisors for curricular and professional information, but may be less aware that college counselors are available to address personal-social concerns. Students may assume these issues must be addressed by outside mental health counselors. As such, students' awareness of this as a career path may be limited. Similarly, lack of personal exposure to rehabilitation counselors and integrated care specialists may also result in a lack of awareness of these as viable professions to pursue. If employers wish to hire college counselors, rehabilitation counselors, and integrated care specialists, and graduate programs wish to recruit students for programs in these areas, they may need to exert additional efforts to better inform students of these career paths to promote interest and ensure qualified individuals pursue degrees in these areas.

The findings from the present study also highlighted some important differences in the type of master's degree programs participants were interested in pursuing based on gender, age of participant, and whether or not one identified as first generation college student. Of note, 17% of female participants selected a master's program in school counseling while no males selected this degree. School counseling is known to be overrepresented by females, with 77% of school counselors being women (Bridgeland & Bruce, 2011). Ongoing efforts to recruit males to this field continue to be needed. Males were four times more likely to select a master's degree in addictions counseling than females, while females were more than three times more likely to select social work than males. Gender specific recruiting efforts may be needed for these degree areas as well. Pertaining to human services, females were twice as interested in graduate degrees than were males. While male participants seemed more interested in a master's degree in human services than in school counseling or social work, more efforts to promote male interest may be needed during undergraduate education to help equalize interest in a human services graduate degree as well.

Age also influenced participants' interests in graduate degrees. Mental health counseling was selected by far more individuals who were 30 years of age or younger than those over 30, while addictions counseling was favored by those over 30. Social work was favored by those under 30, but human services was of interest to everyone regardless of age. This generalized interest in a master's in human services may be due to the participants' current enrollment in an undergraduate human services program. Recognizing the interest these students had in continuing with a master's in the same field as their bachelor's may be valuable for colleges and universities who may consider providing a path toward achieving this, particularly if they include direct admittance and offer the programming online.

Status as a first generation college student also influenced preferences for graduate degrees in this study. First generation college students were two times more likely to prefer a master's in college counseling, and almost three times more likely to prefer a master's in addictions counseling than those who did not identify as first generation college students. Of the eight students who selected a graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling, seven were first generation college students. Conversely, those who did not identify as first generation college students preferred a master's degree in marriage and family therapy at almost two times the rate of those who did. Finally, more of those who were not first generation college students preferred a master's in human services than those who were. The reasons for these preferences were not explored in this study. Follow-up research might examine the reasons for the differences in preferences for master's degrees among participants with varying demographics.

Conclusion

The current preliminary, exploratory survey study aimed to shed light on whether or not undergraduate students of human services desire to obtain a master's degree, and if so, what type of master's degree they prefer. It also aimed to explore participants' preferences for automatic admissions to master's programs, and preferences for programming format. The results indicated that undergraduate students of human services do indeed plan to continue their education and pursue a master's degree, and that they prefer to pursue this degree online and through a direct admittance process. Moreover, they are most interested in pursuing a master's degree in social work or human services. Students also indicated an interest in several counseling related master's degrees. Some variations in preferences for master's degrees exist based on demographic variables including gender, age and first generation college student status. These variations may be taken into consideration when considering marketing and recruiting strategies for both

employers and institutions of higher learning. As human services students begin to consider their future, it is vital that their undergraduate programs, related master's level programs, and employers provide sound insight and direction so that students can have a successful start, and a full and rewarding career throughout their work lives.

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