EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN FIRST-YEAR MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

by

Dana Meredith Horne

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DEDICATION

To my children Donovan and Maia.
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This dissertation journey would not have been possible without the love, support, encouragement, and extreme patience of my children, family, friends, co-workers, and committee members. To my children, Donovan and Maia—Mom is FINALLY done! Thank you both for your unconditional love and support. For the countless times I had to say “just a few minutes, mom has homework,” thank you for your patience and understanding. I know this dissertation was likely as hard on you as it was on me. You two were my driving force to see this goal to fruition. I love you both tremendously and am so blessed to be your Mom.

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ABSTRACT

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN FIRST-YEAR MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Dana Meredith Horne
Doctor of Education in Higher Education Leadership, 2017
Azusa Pacific University
Advisor: Karen A. Longman, Ph.D.

Emotional intelligence has been defined as “the ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them” (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999, p. 267). Despite the relevance of emotional intelligence to social work education, limited research has focused on the assessment of emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic success in social work education. This predictive correlational study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and student success in a Master of Social Work (MSW) program, including the extent to which the completion of the first-year MSW curriculum impacted a student’s emotional intelligence. The main findings of this study indicated that a student’s level of emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of student success, either at entry into an MSW program or at the conclusion of the first year of study in an MSW program. An unexpected finding of this study was that participants’ levels of emotional intelligence actually declined over the course of completing 1 year of coursework, including field
experience in the MSW program. Although this study’s student success regression model was found not to be a significant predictor of graduate student thriving, secondary findings did reveal that a student’s level of emotional intelligence at entry into an MSW program was a significant predictor of Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) total mean scores, indicating pre-emotional intelligence predicts thriving in a graduate MSW program. Additionally, despite the decline of emotional intelligence over the course of the first year of study, students’ end-of-year level of emotional intelligence was found to be correlated with their levels of thriving within the MSW program. The connection between emotional intelligence and graduate student thriving offers social work educators an alternative approach to measuring and defining student success by identifying factors that help students to thrive and succeed within a Master of Social Work program.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

By its very nature, social work as a profession requires certain practitioner competencies to build effective relationships among the many providers and consumers of social services. These competencies can include, but are not limited to, a high level of self-awareness, empathy, active listening skills, a commitment to social justice, the ability to understand difference, and extraordinary problem-solving abilities (Hennessey, 2011; Sowbel, 2012). Effective social workers are practitioners who have the ability to forge therapeutic relationships by understanding, perceiving, and managing the emotions of not only their clients, but also themselves (Ingram, 2012). All of these abilities necessitate a high level of emotional intelligence. Understanding a student’s level of emotional intelligence at the point of admission into a Master’s of Social Work program may help determine that student’s suitability and potential for success in both the academic program and the profession at large.

Educating social work students to be effective in today’s complex social service industry not only requires curriculum components that give students a solid understanding of the micro, mezzo, and macro approaches to social work practice, but also curriculum components that enhance students’ social and emotional competence. Social and emotional competence can foster interprofessional proficiencies within the social services and helping professions. Research has demonstrated that individuals with
strong emotional intelligence establish and develop more cohesive and supportive relationships (Abraham, 1999; Goleman, 1995; Saarni, 1999; Schutte et al., 2001; Thoits, 1989). Emotionally intelligent individuals are more in tune with both their own and others’ emotions and feelings, which guide their thinking and actions and allow more effective and productive relationships (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Emotional intelligence has been defined in the literature as “the ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them” (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999, p. 267). Shebib (2003) advocated that in addition to strong interpersonal abilities, high levels of self-awareness within the field of social work are necessary for effective practice. Shebib advocated that to become a competent social worker, individuals being trained must acquire “a high level of awareness of who they are” (p. 54). Shebib elaborated on the importance of this dimension of social work preparation:

Until social workers develop self-awareness of their own needs, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, including their personal problems and their areas of vulnerability, they will be unable to respond to their clients with objectivity. Social workers who lack self-awareness and those who are not motivated to pursue it are destined to remain unaware of the ways they influence their clients.

(p. 54)

A commitment to utilizing operational self-awareness is necessary when engaging in the therapeutic process with clients (Sowbel, 2012). Interpersonal ability and enhanced self-awareness both require an elevated form of emotional intelligence.
The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body of all U.S. social work education Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work programs, mandates programs to consider a student’s suitability for the profession during the admissions process (Gibbs, 1994; GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Miller & Koerin, 1988). Suitability for the profession includes both academic and non-academic factors. Grade point averages (GPAs) and cognitive aptitude assessments such as the American College Testing (ACT) standardized test, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) are frequently used to assess an applicant’s academic potential; however, identifying standard criteria to assess how non-academic factors impact an applicant’s suitability for academic study and the profession has been challenging for schools of social work to fully comprehend and administer (Gibbons, Bore, Munro, & Powis, 2007). Research findings have indicated that non-cognitive attributes, such as those associated with emotional intelligence, can be more important than cognitive attributes (e.g., writing ability, numeric skills) for academic and professional success in social work (Seipel, Johnson, & Walton, 2011). Yet, despite the importance of personal attributes in assessing suitability among the admissions criteria for many social work programs, non-cognitive attributes continue to hold far less weight than academic preparation (Gibbs & Blakely, 2000).

Across varying graduate disciplines, undergraduate GPA and GRE scores have been found to be reliable predictors of graduate school success (Halberstam & Redstone, 2005). Although cognitive measures (e.g., undergraduate GPA and GRE scores) have demonstrated predictive validity and reliability in admissions in terms of academic success in professional programs such as social work, nursing, pharmacy, and medicine,
academic success in an MSW program does not necessarily translate into effective social work practice upon graduation (Dunlap, Henley, & Fraser, 1998). Indeed, admissions committees are beginning to recognize the importance in non-cognitive skills when assessing applicant suitability for graduate student and professional success (Fortune, 2003; Humphrey-Murto, Leddy, Wood, Puddester, & Moineau, 2014; Radford, 2011; Romanelli, Cain, & Smith, 2006).

One potential way of measuring academic capacity for success, as well as non-academic capacity for success, is by measuring a student’s responses on a recently-developed instrument called the Thriving Quotient (TQ; Schreiner, McIntosh, Nelson, & Pothoven, 2009). Items used in the Thriving Quotient can be clustered into an assessment of three domains: academic thriving, interpersonal thriving, and intrapersonal thriving (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). The concept of thriving in an MSW program as one means of assessing a student’s likelihood of success within an academic program has never been studied. Thriving, as measured by the Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013), is used in this study as an independent variable.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which emotional intelligence accounts for the variation in student success, which is operationalized as cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) scores measured at the completion of 1 year of a Master of Social Work curriculum. Four research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of
curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?

3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?

The main hypothesis is that there will be a positive relationship between emotional intelligence scores and student success outcomes for students enrolled in a Master of Social Work program. With the goal of graduating competent social work students as the main purpose of many social work education programs and the nature of social work curriculum’s focus on equipping students to develop and sustain affective relationships (Ingram, 2013), a secondary hypothesis is that students’ level of emotional intelligence will increase as a result of completing social work coursework.

The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

H1: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major and students’ MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) scores at entry into an MSW program, these variables will significantly contribute to the variance in student cumulative graduate GPA at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.
H2: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major and students’ MSCEIT scores at entry into an MSW program, these variables will account for a significant proportion of the variance in student cumulative field practice competency scores at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.

H3: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major, and students’ MSCEIT scores at entry into an MSW program, these variables will significantly contribute to the variance in student Graduate Thriving Quotient scores at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.

H4: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate academic major, students’ MSCEIT scores measured after completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program will significantly contribute to the variance in cumulative graduate GPA at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.

H5: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate academic major, students’ MSCEIT scores measured after completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program will significantly contribute to the variance of field practice competency scores at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.

H6: After controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate academic major, students’ MSCEIT scores measured after completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program will significantly contribute to the variance in
Graduate Thriving Quotient scores at the end of their first year of full-time enrollment in the Master of Social Work Program.

H7: Completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program will increase students’ emotional intelligence.

H8: There will be a positive relationship between cumulative graduate GPA and field practice competency scores.

H9: There will be a positive relationship between cumulative graduate GPA and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores.

H10: There will be a positive relationship between field competency scores and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores.

Hypotheses 1 to 6 were tested by conducting hierarchical multiple regressions representing the three dependent variables. Hypothesis 7 was tested by a paired samples t test. Hypotheses 8 to 10 were tested by conducting Pearson correlations analysis utilizing the independent variables.

Significance of the Study

Although the admission process for most social work programs relies heavily—and appropriately—on a candidate’s cognitive ability, the personal characteristics of the candidate and the emotional intelligence required by the profession also deserve close attention in the admissions process. Schools of social work are responsible for identifying and admitting students who will be successful in their academic programs and for graduating competent and professional social workers (Miller & Koerin, 1998). Educators recognize that college success amounts to more than test scores and high GPAs. As a profession regulated by ethical standards and that requires a mastery of
competencies to achieve a degree in social work, this research study explored the connection between emotional intelligence upon entrance as a predictor of student success within a Master of Social Work program.

Despite the relevance of emotional intelligence to social work education, limited research has focused on the assessment of emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic success in social work education. Traditionally, student success has been narrowly interpreted by cognitive outcome metrics such as GPA, degree attainment, and comprehensive examination scores (Burmeister et al., 2014). Research on academic success has recently expanded to assess the capacity of psychosocial factors (e.g., factors related to emotional intelligence) when predicting student success (Allen, Robbins, & Sawyer, 2009; Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Assessing psychosocial factors as predictors of college success represents a change of approach, given that historically, psychosocial factors have been assessed as education outcome measures (Robbins, Lauver, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004).

In their grounded theory study utilizing an inductive approach, Lafrance, Gray, and Herbert (2004) interviewed field practicum instructors who supervised third- and fourth-year bachelor of social work students. Based on their research findings, Lafrance, et al. theorized that an individual’s personal attributes, capacity and willingness for self-awareness, ability to form social work relationships, and personal congruence with social work values were interlinking categories of characteristics that led to more suitable and effective social workers. The debate concerning cognitive vs. non-cognitive factors in effective study and practice is well noted in the helping professions literature in fields such as psychology, medicine, and nursing (Elam, 2000; Lam & Kirby, 2002; Romanelli
et al., 2006). When considering factors that predict effective interprofessional practice, evaluative assessments have been attentive to practitioners’ cognitive or academic ability. Non-cognitive and “inextricably intertwined” (Norcross, 2002, p. 4) competencies, such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and empathy, are key for building relationships (Camp, 2012). Thus, effective interpersonal competencies are indispensable abilities social workers ought to possess. Poor interpersonal skills can lead to less effective approaches when facilitating client change and can potentially influence client deterioration (Lambert, 1989).

Although increased interest in emotional intelligence and social work practice has been evident in British, Australian, and Israeli social work journals (Howe, 2008; Ingram, 2013; Morrison, 2007), rigorous examination of the connections between emotional intelligence and social work practice and study within the United States has been limited. Notably, although American social work journals have published few articles specifically addressing emotional intelligence and social work practice and study, the social work literature within the U.S. context reflects substantial debate about the characteristics and suitability of individuals seeking to become social workers. The ramifications of admitting unsuitable students into social work programs and potentially graduating unsuitable social workers could result in ethical violations and/or professional misconduct that would be detrimental to the profession of social work and the constituents who rely on social workers’ services. Understanding more about the role of emotional intelligence in identifying suitable social work students at the point of admissions to a Master of Social Work program may contribute to the preparation of more suitable and competent social workers.
Definition of Terms

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

For the purposes of this study, the definition of Emotional Intelligence has been adopted from the work of Mayer et al. (1999). Emotional Intelligence is defined as the “ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them” (p. 267).

Field Competency Scores

The term field competency scores refers to the six core social work professional competencies (Appendix A) identified in the standards of the Council on Social Work (2008). Achieved mastery of these core concepts prepares graduates for generalist social work practice. For this study, the six core competencies from 2008 were utilized to determine students’ field competency scores:

- Identify as a professional social worker, apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice, and conduct oneself accordingly.
- Engage diversity and difference in practice to advance human rights and social and economic justice.
- Apply advanced engagement skills (with individuals, groups, families, organization, and communities).
- Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
- Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.
• Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments to assess, intervene, and evaluate individuals, families, organizations, and communities.

[NB: These competencies are based on the 2008 CSWE competencies. In 2015, the CSWE updated the competencies, resulting in nine core competencies (Appendix B).]

**Undergraduate Grade Point Average (UGPA)**

For the purpose of this study, undergraduate grade point average is defined as the average of cumulative grades obtained in coursework across all prior college or university experiences (Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014).

**Graduate Grade Point Average (GGPA)**

Graduate grade point average is defined as the average of cumulative grades obtained in coursework within the graduate program.

**MSCEIT**

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 2002) is a 141-item ability test “intended to measure four branches, or skill groups, of EI: (a) perceiving emotions accurately, (b) using emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotion, and (d) managing emotion” (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenious, 2003, p. 97).

**Student Success**

For the purpose of this study, student success is defined and measured by the graduate cumulative GPA at the conclusion of the first year, total mean field competency score (FCS) at the conclusion of the first year, and a total mean Graduate Thriving
Quotient (GTQ) score. For all three criterion measures, the higher the mean score, the higher the level of student success.

**Thriving**

As it relates to student success, thriving is the achievement of optimal functioning through engaged learning and academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and psychological functioning (Schreiner, 2012).

**Graduate Thriving Quotient (GTQ)**

The Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) is an 18-item measure that assesses students’ optimal functioning academically, interpersonally, and psychologically. The GTQ is a high-order construct consisting of five factors: Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, Positive Perspective, Social Connectedness, and Diverse Citizenship (Petridis, 2015). The total Graduate Thriving Quotient mean score and the mean subscale scores of the five factors are used within the analysis.

**Summary**

Social work is a rapidly-changing and increasingly complex profession that struggles to meet the increased needs and demands of its consumers (Morrison, 2007). To meet this need, schools of social work must identify and admit students who will not only be academically successful in MSW programs, but also graduate students who will be suitable and competent social workers. Despite the relevance of emotional intelligence to social work education, little research has assessed emotional intelligence as a predictor of academic success in social work education and professional practice. This study investigated the extent to which emotional intelligence contributed to the
variance in MSW student success and explored whether emotional intelligence levels changed as a result of completing 1 year of curriculum in an MSW program.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and student success in a Master of Social Work (MSW) program, including the extent to which the completion of the first year MSW curriculum impacted a student’s emotional intelligence. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing one year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?

3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?

As context for this study, a review of the literature regarding the history of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work
Education (CSWE) is presented. The role and mission of these governing bodies comprise an important part of the discussion surrounding the constituents of professional competence and what characteristics are desirable for those seeking a Master of Social Work. Understanding professional competence and suitability for the profession provided a framework to aid in the identification of factors that lead to student success within MSW programs. Finally, literature related to the independent variables utilized in this study are summarized and critiqued, with particular emphasis on the impact these variables have on student success within MSW programs.

**Social Work Governance**

Within many industrialized countries, the profession of social work is guided by values, codes of ethics, and standards. In the United States, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the governing organization that establishes and oversees the profession’s values, codes of ethics, and standards of practice.

**National Association of Social Workers**

Established in 1955 as a result of consolidating seven social work professional organizations, the NASW’s primary function is to establish and maintain professional standards of practice, advance social policies, and enhance the professional status of social workers (NASW, 2014). The preamble of the NASW Code of Ethics defines the mission of social work as the charge to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (p. 5). Upholding professional values and adhering to professional ethics are two of the primary responsibilities of a competent social worker.
The NASW professional values, code of ethics, and standards provide a framework for social workers to evaluate their own professional practice and competency levels, while also safeguarding the quality of practice for those reliant on social services. Mastery of professional competence is vital within the field of social work, given that social workers serve some of society’s most vulnerable and disenfranchised populations. Failing to demonstrate professional competence within the field of social work can lead to ethical violations, and/or professional misconduct, harm clients, and damage the credibility and prestige of the profession (Pooler, Siebert, Faul, & Huber, 2008). Therefore, it is important that all those employed in schools of social work help students understand and acquire competencies that support the NASW professional values and the social work code of ethics and standards.

**Code of Ethics**

Established to serve as a basis and standard for everyday conduct of social workers, the NASW code of ethics was first instituted in 1960 and most recently revised and approved by the 2008 NASW Delegate Assembly (NASW, 2014). The code of ethics provides a guide for ethical decision-making processes, rather than offering a rigid set of rules. The code of ethics is comprised of six ethical values and principles on which the social work mission is based: (a) service, (b) social justice, (c) dignity and worth of the person, (d) importance of human relationships, (e) integrity, and (f) competence (Table 1). Regardless of professional function, social workers and social work students should operate within the sphere of the code of ethics.
Table 1

National Association of Social Workers Core Values and Ethical Principles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value</th>
<th>Ethical Principle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Social workers’ primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.</em> Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers are encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro bono service).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td><em>Social workers challenge social injustice.</em> Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers’ social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity and Worth of the Person</td>
<td><em>Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.</em> Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients’ socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Human Relationships</td>
<td><em>Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.</em> Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities. <em>Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Social workers are continually aware of the profession’s mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td><em>Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.</em> Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* paragraphs 2-7.
As evidenced within the code of ethics and principles and by its very nature, social work as a profession requires certain practitioner competencies to build conducive relationships among the many providers and consumers of social services. Effective utilization of professional competencies is required for social workers to successfully engage in practice with their clients. To build conducive relationships, practitioners must have high levels of self-awareness, empathy, objectivity, adaptability, active listening skills, analytical reasoning, and problems solving abilities (Hennessey, 2011). Within the nation’s social work education programs, professional competencies are taught, fostered, and assessed to ensure suitable practitioners will enter the profession and uphold the mission of social work.

To help support the purpose and mission of social work and guide social work education, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is charged by its own mission with ensuring and enhancing the “quality of social work education for a professional practice that promotes individual, family, and community well-being, and social and economic justice” (CSWE, 2004, para. 2). In concert with the NASW, the purpose of the CSWE is to guide social work educators “to enable [their] students to integrate the knowledge, values, and skills of the social work profession” (CSWE, 2004, p. 4), and thereby to produce competent and effective social workers who will promote human and community well-being.

**Council on Social Work Education**

In response to the need to recognize a sole organization to set and maintain social work education accreditation criteria, the American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW) and the National Association of Schools of Social Administration
(NASSA) dissolved, and the CSWE was established in 1952 to “promote the development of sound programs of social work education in the United States, its territories and possessions, and Canada” (Kendall, 2002, p. 109). The CSWE sets and upholds national accreditation standards for U.S. baccalaureate and master’s degree programs in social work, but does not accredit Doctorate of Social Work (DSW) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs in Social Work or Social Welfare. The CSWE is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the only accrediting agency for social work education in the United States (CSWE, 2015a).

There are 754 accredited social work programs in the United States. Of those 754 programs, 509 are Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) programs and 245 are Master of Social Work (MSW) programs (CSWE, 2016). Given that this research focused specifically on predictors of success in Master of Social Work students, the scope of the literature review was limited to information pertaining to MSW-level accredited social work education programs.

**Enrollment in CSWE Programs**

Each year, the CSWE surveys its institutional members to acquire the most recent data regarding student enrollment in CSWE accredited social work programs. For the 2014 Annual Statistics on Social Work Education in the United States report, 233 Master of Social Work programs were invited to participate, and 231 programs participated in the survey (CSWE, 2015b). The annual survey in 2014 reported that 56,403 students were enrolled in MSW programs across the United States. Of the 56,403 students enrolled, 84% were female and 15% male. Students age 25 years or younger comprised 26% of those enrolled, 44% were 25-34 year olds, 15% were 35-44 year olds, 10% were
years and older, and 5% were unknown (CSWE, 2015b). Unlike undergraduate education, entry into an MSW program is positively associated with graduation from the program. In other words, MSW dropout and failure rates are low (Born & Carroll, 1988; Cole & Lewis, 1993; Dunlap et al., 1998; Gibbs, 1994. In 2014, 25,018 Master of Social Work degrees were awarded (CSWE, 2015b). The majority (55%) of graduates were White (non-Hispanic); 82.4% were female (CSWE, 2015b).

Professional Competence in Social Work

Of upmost importance to schools of social work is to graduate professionally competent and responsible social workers. Within higher education in the United States, the CSWE mandates Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) to ensure accredited social work programs equip their students with the abilities to become “competent and effective professionals” (CSWE, 2004, p. 4). Professional competence was defined by Epstein and Hundert (2002) as “the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served” (p. 226). Within social work education, desired social work competencies are detailed under 10 major headings in CSWE EPAS 2.1 (Appendix A). The 2008 EPAS competencies are:

- Identification as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.
- Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.
- Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
- Engage diversity and difference in practice.
- Advance human rights and social and economic justice.
• Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.
• Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
• Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
• Respond to contexts that shape practice.
• Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluation with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

It is important to note that this study utilized the 2008 EPAS standards; however, in 2015, the CSWE updated the EPAS competencies. The 2015 EPAS competencies can be found in Appendix B.

The ability for social workers to integrate professional competence into social work practice requires the integration of multiple aspects of both cognitive and non-cognitive factors (Bandali, Parker, Mummery, & Preece, 2008). Failing to properly train and educate future social workers to become professionally competent violates the Council on Social Work Education’s purpose and mission, as well as the mission of the National Association of Social Workers.

Under the auspices of both the NASW and CSWE, accredited programs are tasked with not only educating students in a manner befitting the social work profession, but also with determining the suitability of the students to the social work profession (Seipel et al., 2011; Tam, Coleman, & Boey, 2012). A hypothesis of this study is that emotionally intelligent students will not only evidence high academic ability in the theoretical components of an MSW program, but will also evidence high professional competence in the integration and practice components of the MSW curriculum.
Assessing the emotional intelligence of MSW applicants as a part of the admissions criteria may help admissions committees better identify suitable social work candidates and practitioners, while also providing a measure of professional gatekeeping.

**Suitability for Practice and Gatekeeping of MSW Programs**

Upon completion of the MSW degree, social workers must demonstrate comprehension of social work values, ethics, and exhibit professional competence (Kimberly & Osmond, 2009). Most importantly, social workers must conduct themselves responsibly (CSWE, 2006). Morrison (2006) suggested that social workers must have mastered five fundamental responsibilities to be effective: (a) engaging the client/user; (a) assessment and observation; (c) decision making; (d) collaboration and cooperation; and (e) the ability to deal with stress. Achieving high competence within the five fundamental responsibilities requires elevated levels of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, empathy, self-awareness, and self-management (LaFrance et al., 2000; Miller & Koerin, 1998; Morrison, 2006; Ryan, McCormack, & Cleak, 2006). Although it might be assumed that individuals who choose to enter the helping professions such as social work are more likely to possess these characteristics, the growing body of social work literature has indicated that some social work applicants fail to exhibit these elevated skills (Bogo et al., 2006; Lafrance et al., 2004; Olkin & Gaughen, 1991; Rosenberg, Getzelman, Arcinue, & Oren, 2005; Vacha-Haase, Davenport & Kerewsky, 2004).

The duty of ascertaining whether an applicant has the ability to learn the necessary skills to work in the profession of social work resides with the program in which the student seeks to enroll (GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Miller & Koerin, 1998; Tam et al., 2012). Within professional fields such as nursing, counseling, and social
work, the term “gatekeeping” is commonly used to describe the process of assessing students’ suitability for practice within the respective profession (Brear, Dorrian, & Luscri, 2008). Schools of social work are charged by the CSWE to ensure students graduating from their programs will adhere to and uphold the NASW code of ethics. “Suitability for practice” as a social work professional is a key factor admissions personnel assess when reviewing applicants for Master of Social Work programs. However, educators must go beyond screening students for suitability at the admissions stage. In addition, social work students face ongoing and continual assessments of their suitability for the profession throughout their education program (Brear et al., 2008; Gibbs, 1994; Gibbs & Blakely, 2000; Moore & Urwin, 1991; Reynolds, 2004; Tam et al., 2012). Assessing suitability for the social work profession is one of the most emotionally charged and challenging debates within social work education (Moore & Urwin, 1991; Raskin, 1994; Younes, 1998). In part, this debate has reflected the profession’s assumptions that all people have the potential to change and are capable of growth (LaFrance et al., 2000; Tam & Coleman, 2011). Some social work educators might be more willing to accept marginally suited applicants, or those who are “unready” (Gibbons et al., 2007, p. 211), because allowing admission of these students would align with the profession’s values and belief that individuals can change (Miller & Koerin, 1998). Theoretically, then, through adequate exposure to curriculum, educational programming could cultivate desirable and more suitable non-cognitive characteristics of social work practitioners.

Given that the purpose of social work education programs is to prepare students to be suitable for the profession, and despite suitability criteria screenings within the
admissions process, some students who lack the interpersonal and intrapersonal skill sets necessary for the profession go undetected and are admitted into social work programs. Over the course of their studies, these students may reveal behaviors and characteristics that demonstrate their unsuitability for the profession. Although contextualizing what constitutes unsuitability for the profession is debated in the literature (Vacha-Haase et al., 2004), a description of the term “unsuitable student” was offered by Olkin and Gaughen (1991):

Unsuitable is used to describe those students whose personal limitations or problem behaviors are of such a nature or severity that they are deemed by educators to impede the students’ ability to professionally practice. (p. 279)

To address the issue of unsuitability, Brear et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis comparing the findings of 14 empirical studies to assess factors of student unsuitability in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, social work, and other closely-related degree programs. Findings identified intrapersonal deficiencies, such as poor self-awareness and the inability to manage emotions, as determining factors of student unsuitability. Given that emotionally intelligent individuals possess healthy levels of self-awareness and higher-order abilities to manage their emotions, further exploration of emotional intelligence as an admission screening mechanism within Master of Social Work programs may be beneficial to the profession.

**Social Work Program Admissions Standards**

Measuring success and protecting the “gate” begin at the point of admissions. As with many professional graduate programs, emphasis on identifying applicants with strong cognitive ability is a primary focus during the admissions review process (Grehan,
Flanagan, & Malgady, 2011). Although entry into social work degree programs requires certain standards in terms of academic ability, whole-person suitability for the program and profession is also important (Fortune, 2003; Reynolds, 2004). Admission into social work graduate programs typically requires an acceptable undergraduate grade point average (UGPA), graduate record examination (GRE) score (if applicable), letters of reference from academic or professionals related to the applicant’s readiness for graduate work, and a personal essay or statement indicating the applicant’s desire to enter the degree program and subsequent profession (Elpers & Fitzgerald, 2012; Miller & Koerin, 1998). Although these application criteria provide the opportunity to assess an applicant’s suitability for academic success, they do not always provide an adequate level of screening necessary to assess a student’s suitability for the profession.

Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham, and Ackerman (2006) noted that with selective graduate programs, applicants’ cognitive ability levels become more homogeneous. The predictive power of cognitive ability decreases as levels of formal higher education increase (Ackerman, 1994, Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2005, Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2006). Although admissions standards for MSW programs are at the discretion of an institution and program and can vary, an undergraduate average GPA of a “B” or higher tends to be a common admissions standard among CSWE accredited MSW programs, according to the Chair of the National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work Admissions, (K. Kendall, personal communication, July 20, 2014). Given this admissions standard, applicant pools within MSW programs tend to be more homogeneous; accordingly, assessing and considering non-cognitive factors may help to predict both suitability for a profession and academic success.
Although some applicants are deemed unsuitable for the profession within the admissions process and are not admitted, at times unsuitable students are successfully admitted into a program. Even if academic suitability for the profession is assessed during the admissions process, attitudes and behaviors incompatible with the profession often are not fully revealed until faculty encounter these behaviors during the practice competency courses such as intervention courses or a field practicum (Bogo et al., 2004, 2006; Cole & Lewis, 1993; Homonoff, 2008).

In fact, despite their lack of intrapersonal skills, unsuitable students may continue to meet the academic requirements of the program (LaFrance et al., 2004). According to Brear et al. (2008), encountering unsuitable students post-admission is a regular occurrence for faculty within professional graduate programs, such as counseling, nursing, and social work. Statistics related to the prevalence of unsuitable students within professional programs vary. Some research has estimated that 4% to 10% of students admitted into professional programs such as clinical psychology and social work are unsuitable for their respective profession (Boxley, Drew, & Rangel, 1986; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002, 2006). Using the 2014 CSWE enrollment figures and the unsuitable percentages, this potential estimate suggests that between 2,250 to 5,640 students enrolled each year in social work programs prove themselves eventually to be unsuitable for the profession. In a profession guided by a code of ethics and that often requires a professional license to practice, non-suitable students can be problematic for educators preparing the next generation of social workers, negatively impact the learning process of other students, and potentially harm clients within field education practicums.
Managing non-suitable students within a program is a difficult matter for many schools, given that clear termination policies for non-academic reasons are rarely outlined or utilized (Sowbel, 2012). Research reported by Peterman and Blake (1986) and Younes (1998) reflected the challenges of appropriately managing students who are academically successful yet fail to exhibit the personal qualities and behaviors suitable for the profession of social work. Uncertainty regarding how to manage those students can lead schools of social work to spend extraordinary amounts of time and energy to manage the detrimental influence these non-suitable behaviors have on the learning process (Gibbons et al., 2007). Given that managing unsuitable students can become burdensome and challenging once admitted into an MSW program, the better course of action is to gate-keep entry into the program by using appropriate screening methods, such as considering non-cognitive attributes associated with emotional intelligence.

When unsuitable behaviors or “destructive student-to-student experiences” (Gibbons et al., p. 212) occur in the classroom and are not managed expeditiously and appropriately by faculty or social work administrators, the lasting effects of the unsuitable behavior can negatively impact the learning environment. The climate for learning is an important factor of engaged learning (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005), given that the learning process and the learning environment work in concert, influencing one another in a continuous interplay (Vermetten, Vermunt, & Lodewijks, 2002). It is therefore important to limit problematic behaviors that occur in learning environments and impede the learning process (Bjorklund & Rehling, 2010; Boysen, 2012; Braxton & Jones, 2008; Feldman, 2001; Gibbons et al, 2007; Nordstrom, Bartels, & Bucy, 2009) or have a negative influence on clients encountered during a field placement.
When unsuitable behaviors undermine the learning environment, some content objectives might be inadvertently overlooked. This missed content may impede the ability of students to achieve competence in the subject matter. Further, disruption of the learning environment may undermine social work educators’ ability to meet their responsibility to ensure students who have mastered social work knowledge, skills, and values are competent to enter the profession. The failure of students to achieve competence in subject matters may impede students’ ability to earn the MSW degree, professional license, and most importantly, fulfill their professional responsibilities as a social worker.

**Predictors of Success in an MSW Program**

In addition to ensuring unsuitable behaviors do not impede the learning process, admissions committees assume students they admit will be sufficiently adept to persist and succeed in their graduate programs. Identifying factors that may predict student success in a social work program has long been a topic of debate among social work educators (Bremner & Zastrow, 2008; Dunlap et al., 1998; Gibbons et al., 2007; Miller & Koerin, 1998).

In a review of relevant literature, Fortune (2003) reported that GPA, the quality of an undergraduate institution, and the chosen academic undergraduate major were predictors of student success in MSW programs. Research has identified the correlation of undergraduate GPA with academic performance in MSW programs (Bogo & Davin, 1989; Dunlap et al., 1998; Fortune, Green, & Kolevzon, 1987). Dunlap et al. (1998) documented a relationship between the quality of undergraduate colleges and subsequent graduate success. These scholars found that students who graduated from baccalaureate
institutions affiliated with Phi Beta Kappa, an arts and sciences academic honor society, earned higher scores on MSW comprehensive exams than did students who did not. It is ironic that in studies assessing academic majors as predictors of success in MSW programs, students whose undergraduate degrees were in social work had poorer graduate academic performance than those students with other undergraduate majors (Dunlap et al., 1998; Fortune et al., 1987; Specht, Britt, & Frost, 1987). Dunlap et al. speculated that the poorer academic performance of those with Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) degrees may be due to the fact that these students are, on average, younger; they have lower GRE scores and higher undergraduate GPAs; and fewer graduated from institutions that affiliate with Phi Beta Kappa.

Although the literature has identified GPA, the quality of the undergraduate institution, and academic major as predictors of success in an MSW program, Fortune (2003) suggested these predictors may not be the best indicators of professional competence because they fail to consider interpersonal skills. In their respective studies, Lafrance et al. (2004) and GlenMay and Oakes (2002) posited that social work students who have strong levels of self-awareness, honesty, and maturity are more likely to succeed in both academic and professional settings. Although not specific to social work, research assessing personality traits as determinants of labor market success has affirmed that intrapersonal and interpersonal attributes are more influential than cognitive attributes (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Similarly, in their exploratory research to identify desired characteristics that enabled MSW students and social work employees to succeed, Seipel et al. (2011) found that personal attributes were more important than cognitive attributes as predictors of success in a social work program and a career in social work.
Additional research is warranted to identify the personal attributes and abilities that may best explain the variance in student success during and following an MSW program.

**Measuring Success in Higher Education**

Although studies have indicated that undergraduate grade point averages are sufficient (or useful) as predictors of success in a graduate MSW program (Fortune, 2003), GPA as a predictor of professional competence in the vocation of social work has not adequately been studied (Seipel et al., 2011). Although there is subjectivity within grading reliability by academic discipline and institution, GPAs have been one of the only quantifiable performance measures widely accepted as an indicator of academic success in American higher education institutions (Plant, Ericsson, Hill, & Asberg, 2005’ Robbins et al., 2004). However, achieving a high GPA does not necessarily equate to students having mastery of the fundamentals within their respective disciplines (Jackson, 1995). Reasons for such discrepancies can vary; for example, grading systems may not be competitive, or programs may utilize a curved grading system, each of which can influence the extent to which grades illustrate a student’s level of academic ability (Sharkness, Eagan, Hurato, Figueroa, & Chang, 2011).

Beyond serving as a quantifiable measure of academic success, GPAs are also the most universal form of documentation provided to prospective employers and advanced degree programs about the quality of a student’s learning (Walvoordt & Anderson, 2010). Yet, grades alone may fail to accurately predict professional promise in employment. Research conducted by Hart Research Associates (2013) concluded that 44% of employers surveyed indicated that today’s college graduates (in general) are not ready for work beyond entry level employment and do not have the skill sets required for advanced
level work. Further, the professionalism of social work requires qualities such as self-awareness, social perceptiveness, and active listening (John, 2012)—qualities not represented in a numeric GPA. The fact that academically successful students may be described as being inadequately prepared to assume advanced responsibilities in today’s workforce may challenge the assumption of utilizing GPA as a primary predictor of workplace success. Broader assessment of social work students’ non-cognitive abilities may be helpful for employers to better assess job applicants’ probability of professional success.

In general, individuals holding advanced degrees are expected to be the “backbone of creation, innovation, and [implementers of] organizational policies, design and implementation of instruction, and provisions of specific services” in a variety of professions (Kasworm & Hemmingsen, 2007, p. 450). Within professional programs such as social work, not evidencing a full mastery of the discipline fundamentals (e.g., creation, innovation, and adherence to policies) is detrimental to the profession. To be proficient service providers, social workers must evidence mastery of learned content in addition to embodying high levels of professional competence. Thus, GPAs alone cannot accurately predict a social work student’s ability to succeed in the profession post-graduation.

As required by the Council on Social Work Education, achieving competencies is also viewed as being indicative of success within academic programs (CSWE, 2015a). Within recent CSWE accreditation standards, in addition to explicit curriculum competencies, evidence of competencies achieved through implicit curriculum is also required (CSWE, 2015a). For example, Stadler (1997) suggested “implicit learning
depends on non-cognitive, nonhierarchical associations, whereas explicit learning depends on cognitive, hierarchical associations” (p. 56). The importance of learning that occurs outside the formal classroom has contributed to greater attention being placed on assessing student success in more ways than simply relying upon GPA (Kinzie, 2012).

Nationally and internationally, the commitment to assessing student success has increasingly emphasized a multi-dimensional approach beginning within the admissions process (GlenMaye & Oakes, 2002; Halberstam & Redstone, 2005). With regard to graduate admissions, the need for assessing non-cognitive indicators during the admissions process to augment the cognitive measures of the GRE has long been affirmed (Kyllonen, Walters, & Kaufman, 2005). In their analysis of the validity of the GRE for 82,659 graduate students, Kuncel, Hezlett, and Ones (2001) advocated for the inclusion of non-cognitive variables such as personality and interest during the admissions process. Further investigation of the contribution of non-cognitive factors in student success and the creation of new assessments could more effectively guide graduate admissions professionals.

The contributions of non-cognitive factors associated with college student success have long been recognized by practitioners; however, assessing how non-cognitive factors impact the college student experience was not formally assessed on a national scale until the late 1990s. In 1998, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was developed with the goal of gathering information about collegiate quality (NSSE, 2014). Assessments such as the NSSE opened opportunities to assess various behavioral factors of learning within a college setting that influence student success. Although this approach has been informative, the focus of the NSSE research is limited to assessing
undergraduate student success. Because undergraduate education programs differ in design and purpose than graduate education programs, the information gleaned from assessments such as NSSE are not necessarily transferable to graduate student populations.

Researchers have long studied the role graduate education has played in the development of the professional self (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Braxton & Baird, 2001; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Gardner, 2005; Gardner & Barnes, 2007; Sweitzer, 2009); however, better understanding is needed of the variability of student success within professional and graduate education programs. To address this need, researchers are broadening the scope of student success research to include identifying and analyzing psychosocial factors within graduate student populations (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Understanding the psychosocial factors that lead to student success within graduate programs may provide valuable information that will guide graduate admissions professionals to identify students who will be best suited for graduate study and help educators understand how a graduate program might influence a student’s psychosocial development. Specifically related to graduate social work programs, having a stronger comprehension of psychosocial factors that lead to student success may help identify MSW applicants and students who are suitable both for the graduate program and the profession of social work.

**College Student Success**

Understanding the contributors to the success of social work students and social work practitioners extends beyond just considering GPAs of graduates. The need for deeper and more nuanced understanding parallels important trends across other
professional programs and, more broadly, higher education as a whole. In fact, colleges
and universities have long been concerned with college student success and college
completion rates (Bail, Zhang, & Tachiyama, 2008). Although most scholars
acknowledge success in college requires a combination of both cognitive and social
competencies, higher education institutions continue to heavily rely upon GPAs to
measure academic success (Sternberg, 1985; Zigler & Trickett, 1978). In the book How
to Study in College, Pauk (1962) defined academic success by the tasks or skills students
learned and applied in their coursework. According to Pauk and Ross (2013), achieving
success in college necessitates that students have self-perception, have self-
determination, and possess the ability to overcome adversity. These interpersonal
abilities are factors associated with achieving success in college.

Increasingly, the literature related to student success has indicated that certain
behaviors, such as engaged learning and interpersonal relationships, contribute to a life-
transforming college education (McIntosh, 2012; Schreiner, 2012). For example,
psychosocial factors known to influence student success behaviors include psychological
well-being, motivation, and psychological processes (Kinzie, 2012). Students who
demonstrate high levels of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and academic well-being tend to
experience greater success and are described as students who thrive (McIntosh, 2012;
Schreiner, 2012). According to Schreiner (2012), thriving students are fully engaged in
the learning process, as evidenced by:

…investing effort to reach important educational goals, managing their time and
commitments effectively, connecting in healthy ways to other people, [and being]
optimistic about their futures, positive about their present choices, appreciative of differences in others, and committed to enriching their community. (p. 5)

In graduate disciplines such as social work, assessing a student’s ability to thrive may be another helpful mechanism when determining suitability for study and the profession; specific to this study, it may help to identify variables that predict student success within a graduate social work program. To best assess a student’s level of thriving in college, Schreiner developed the Thriving Quotient instrument.

**Thriving Theoretical Framework**

A significant theory that influenced the Thriving Quotient researchers’ understanding of thriving is Keyes and Haidt’s (2003) concept of human flourishing. Keyes (2003) defined flourishing as “a state in which an individual feels positive emotion toward life and is functioning well psychologically and socially” (p. 294). Students who flourish exhibit high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Schreiner, 2012). According to Keyes and Haidt, flourishing individuals truly live rather than merely just exist. Building upon the research related to human flourishing, the Thriving Quotient seeks to distinguish between students who fully embrace the educational environment of college both academically and personally, and those students who simply “exist” in college.

An additional theoretical foundation that informed the development of the construct of thriving stems from the work of Bean and Eaton (2000), who developed a psychological model of college student retention. According to Bean and Eaton (2001), students enter college with psychological attributes formulated by “particular experiences, abilities, and self-assessments” (p. 75). As students interact and engage with
the college environment, they typically engage in a series of self-assessments. When students have positive interactions with the college environment, they tend to display a greater sense of self-efficacy, locus of control, and better coping mechanisms. The more positive the self-assessment, the greater the likelihood a student will be motivated to remain in college and persist until graduation.

Drawing upon these models of psychological well-being (Keys & Haidt, 2003) and student retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000), the conceptual framework of the Thriving Quotient was developed to assess optimal student functioning in three key areas believed to contribute to student success: academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal well-being (Schreiner, 2012; Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). These three identified areas that contribute to student success comprise the three domains of thriving—academic thriving, interpersonal thriving, and intrapersonal thriving (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). It is important to note that the three domains of thriving measure psychological factors that can be influenced or changed by interventions (Schreiner, 2010).

Utilizing confirmatory factor analysis to determine the latent constructs of thriving, researchers identified thriving as a second-order construct comprised of five factors: (a) Engaged Learning, (b) Academic Determination, (c) Positive Perspective, (d) Diverse Community, and (e) Social Connectedness (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). The internal consistency of the Thriving Quotient instrument as a whole yields a Cronbach’s alpha of .91. The five-factor model with thriving as a second-order factor was deemed to be a good fit (RMSEA = .046, Δ2 = .927, TLI = .920, CFI = .927; Schreiner, Pothoven, Nelson, & McIntosh, 2009). To clarify how these factors best fit
the three domains of thriving, each aspect of thriving is described, as well as how each domain relates to social work education and practice.

**Academic Thriving**

Achieving mastery of social work knowledge, skills, and values requires students to actively engage in the learning process. Academic thriving is measured by the factors of engaged learning and academic determination. Academic thriving occurs when students are meaningfully engaged in the learning process as evidenced by their ability to effectively process course materials and make connections between what they know and what needs to be learned (Schreiner, 2012). According to Schreiner and Louis (2011), students who are truly engaged in their studies find the learning process to be energizing. When highly engaged in academics and energized, students’ academic determination is reflected in their willingness to invest the necessary effort to succeed, employ self-regulated learning, master their environments, and utilize goal-directed thinking (Schreiner, 2012).

**Interpersonal Thriving**

Competent social workers must be able to develop effective relationships. Measuring a social work student’s ability to thrive interpersonally may explain the student’s ability to develop effective relationships in social work practice.

Interpersonal thriving is measured by the factors of social connectedness and diverse citizenship. Foundational to both of these factors is the importance of relationships in positive life outcomes. Social connectedness involves students establishing healthy relationships both within a college setting and outside of the college setting (Schreiner, 2012). Healthy relationships help individual students feel connected.
to a larger community, which helps them feel a sense of purpose, that they matter, and that they are valued. Diverse citizenship builds on the concept of healthy relationships and involves students being open to and valuing differences in others while also desiring to make a difference in their respective communities (Schreiner, 2010). According to research conducted by Schreiner, McIntosh, et al. (2009), students with strong interpersonal thriving attributes want to make a significant difference in their communities and the larger society.

**Intrapersonal Thriving**

Effective social work practice necessitates that practitioners have appropriate intrapersonal abilities. Intrapersonal thriving is measured by the Positive Perspective scale that encompasses optimism and subjective well-being. Students who demonstrate strong intrapersonal development have an optimistic way of viewing the world and their future (Schreiner, 2012). Students with positive perspective assess their situations realistically and determine how to overcome and cope with difficulties proactively. They also have the ability to find the positive benefits or learning opportunities within negative or difficult situations. Students with a healthy level of realistic optimism are able to experience more positive emotions regularly (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009).

**The Thriving Domains and Social Work**

The qualities and characteristics described within the five factors of thriving align closely with what social workers attempt to foster and instill in their clients to address the unmet needs and challenges clients face in their daily environments. Clinical social workers often strive to help clients feel more connected to their environments and identify a sense of purpose, which constitutes feeling valued in their daily relationships.
To enhance relationships, clients must be willing to engage in the therapeutic process and invest the time necessary to benefit from the work with which social workers assist (Hill, 2005). One role of a social worker is to help clients set realistic goals and develop proactive coping strategies for the difficulties the client endures (Walsh, 2009).

Given that the foundation of the social work profession is to make a difference, it would benefit schools of social work to identify within their student populations those students who thrive during the experience of earning a social work degree, in contrast to those who simply complete the minimum requirements to achieve their social work degree. If students exhibit the characteristics that are reflective of thriving, then it is likely they will utilize those same characteristics in their professional lives. Thus, both social work programs and the profession would benefit from social workers who possess the characteristics of high levels of thriving and are therefore most likely to make a difference in their communities and the lives of their clients.

Evidenced throughout this literature review is the argument that non-cognitive, or interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities play a role in student success. Given that schools of social work predominantly rely upon cognitive factors when assessing suitability for study and practice, assessing an applicant’s level of thriving may lead to a reliable way to predict the applicant’s ability to be successful in an MSW program. In conjunction with understanding the facets of thriving in an MSW program—assessed by utilizing the Thriving Quotient—schools of social work may need to consider considering a student’s emotional intelligence. To date, the relationship between emotional intelligence and MSW student thriving had not yet been studied. This study therefore explores the
relationship between emotional intelligence and graduate student thriving as predictors of student success in an MSW program.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Whereas the construct of thriving focuses on a college student’s positive emotion and functioning well both psychologically and socially, the construct of Emotional Intelligence relates not only to an individual’s ability to feel emotion, but more specifically to accurately identify emotion both within self and others and to operationalize emotion to understand others. Emotions are recognized as being an “invaluable source of information and feedback” (Grewal & Salovey, 2006, p. 104). Effectively relating on an emotional level of understanding others’ emotions aids in facilitating flexible planning, creative thinking, and the ability to redirect attention and motivation (Schutte et al., 1998), all of which are fundamental abilities to succeeding in college and in life.

Accurately perceiving emotions and using that information appropriately is not an ability that all individuals possess. For example, in a study about social class and empathic accuracy, researchers Krause, Cote, and Keltner (2010) found that an individual’s social class was a predictor of empathic responses. Individuals from higher economic classes had more difficulty perceiving others’ emotions than individuals from lower socioeconomic classes. In the profession of social work, which attracts students from all socioeconomic classes, information gleaned from identifying the emotions of others as well as oneself can play a critical role in achieving professional competence. Exploring emotional intelligence as a predictor of student success in an MSW program
may be a variable that could help administrators identify common characteristics that predict both academic success and professional competence in the social work profession.

Research documenting the influence of emotional intelligence on life satisfaction, work performance, and academic success has been expanding for the past 30 years (Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002; Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004). Conducting a simple keyword search of “Emotional Intelligence” in the ScienceDirect-Elsevier database with the search parameters limited to journal publications in 2014 resulted in 169 articles. The amount of research published on this topic recently documents a heightened level of interest in the construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and how EI may be applied in business, health, and educational settings. However, full understanding of EI is still considered to be in its preliminary phase compared to other intelligence theories such as the seminal work of Thorndike (1920), Gardner (1983), and Sternberg (1985). The preliminary state of research on EI is in part due to the skepticism and criticism concerning the various conceptualizations of emotional intelligence and the lack of psychometric and statistical rigor of EI measures (Brody, 2004; Gignac, 2009; Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009). Despite the criticism, the relationship between EI and significant life outcomes is recognized in both popular literature and within the intelligence research arenas.

**Emotional Intelligence Theory Development**

For the greater part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, psychologists have explored the notion that intelligence is multifaceted and that no single measure of intelligence completely defines human ability. Although cognitive intelligence has long been considered synonymous with ability and can be used to predict individual potential,
the influence of non-cognitive characteristics on cognitive development also has been well documented. Social intelligence was first defined by Edward Thorndike (1920) as “the ability to understand men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations” (p. 227). Psychologists R. L. Thorndike and Stein (1937) identified non-cognitive aspects of intelligence, which they termed “social intelligence” (p. 275) as being distinctly separate from cognitive abilities. Skill development in regard to understanding and managing emotions in self and others and engaging in productive social interactions undergirds the concept of EI in contrast to cognitive ability.

Further evidence of the influence of non-cognitive characteristics on cognitive intelligence can be found in the work of Wechsler (1939). In Wechsler’s development of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, he noted non-intellective as well as intellective elements of intelligence. Non-intellective elements include affective, personal, and social factors, which are associated with an individual’s attitude and behavior. Wechsler (1940) acknowledged that “individuals with identical IQs may differ very markedly in regard to their effective ability to cope with the environment” (p. 444). Wechsler (1958) later argued that these non-intellective elements were essential in helping to predict an individual’s ability to achieve success in life. Despite the perceived influence of non-intellective elements on intelligence, Wechsler (1958) described non-intellective elements as being “just general intelligence applied to social situations” (p. 75).

Influenced by the work of Thorndike (1920) and Wechsler (1939), Gardner (1999) posited that an individual’s interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences were equally as important as cognitive intelligence. Gardner defined interpersonal intelligence as the ability to understand and work well with others, while intrapersonal intelligence
involved the ability to be self-aware, to recognize one’s own feelings, and to utilize this awareness in social interactions. Gardner argued that traditional measures of intelligence that were limited to assessing strictly cognitive abilities failed to consider the influence of individuals’ differing abilities to perceive, process, and manage emotions. How individuals perceive, process, and manage their emotions can influence their cognitive functioning. To Gardner, multiple intelligence was the result of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences.

Although other research on multiple intelligences is noted in historical literature, it was the research of Thorndike (1920), Wechsler (1939), and Gardner (1999) that provided the foundation for the conceptualization of the construct “emotional intelligence.” Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) conceptualized framework presents emotional intelligence as combining practical and distinct skills that can be learned and developed to enhance overall performance; however, debate continues among emotional intelligence researchers regarding whether emotional intelligence is fixed (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004), or if EI can be modified and enhanced over time (Bar-On & Handley, 1999). Despite the debate, EI has increasingly been presented as a legitimate form of intelligence within the larger body of research on intelligence (Boyatzis, 2008; Jaeger, 2003).

Although Goleman’s (1995) book titled Emotional Intelligence helped introduce the concept of Emotional Intelligence within popular culture, it was the formative work of Mayer and Salovey (1995), Mayer et al. (1999, 2004), Bar-On (2000, 2005, 2006), Goleman (1998, 2000), Boyatzis (2008), and Petrides (2009) that established the three most recognized models and measurements of emotional intelligence used today. The contributions of these scholars has resulted in expanded understanding of how emotional
intelligence is positively related to academic (Jaeger, 2003), social (Bracket, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006), and occupational success (Bar-On, Handley, & Fund, 2006). Salovey and Mayer’s 1990 publication of “Emotional Intelligence” in the academic journal *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* and *Time Magazine*’s featured article of Goleman’s 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence* expanded the visibility of emotional intelligence as a construct worthy of scholarly investigation (Furnham, 2006).

**Models of Emotional Intelligence**

Although it should be noted that multiple models of emotional intelligence exist, this section briefly explains the three most recognized models: (a) the ability model, which involves perceiving and expressing emotion while integrating emotion in thought (Mayer & Salovey, 1997); (b) the mixed model, defined and measured by a set of perceived abilities, skills, and personality traits (Bar-On, 2004); and (c) trait emotional intelligence, which is defined as “a constellation of self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies” (Petrides, 2011, p. 657). These models all share similarities, yet slight differences exist among them. Additionally, the three models diverge in their understanding as to whether emotional intelligence is a learned ability or a genetic trait.

**Ability model.** Building upon historical social intelligence research, Salovey and Mayer (1990) were the first to categorize the ability to manage emotions into a hierarchical psychometric model of intelligence. As an intelligence-based and ability-oriented model, Mayer and Salovey introduced a new way to measure intelligence and challenged traditional understanding of what was known about intelligence (Emotional Intelligence Skills Group, n.d.a). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional
intelligence is the ability to accurately “perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions…to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 5).

Mayer et al. (2001) later postulated that emotions and cognition are closely aligned. The heightened ability to monitor one’s feelings and emotions, as well as those of others, is consistent with one’s ability to access feelings initiated by the thought process. According to Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts (2009), emotions enhance cognitive processing, and cognitive processing helps regulate emotions. Further, understanding what another person is feeling involves considerable thinking. Because perceiving emotions necessitates thinking, this ability is considered to be a mental skill that can be developed. Thus, Mayer and Salovey (1997) viewed emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence.

The ability to solve problems by engaging and monitoring emotions in one’s self and others varies across individuals in terms of the ability to identify and beneficially use an understanding of emotion. Similar to IQ assessments, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso’s (2008) model of emotional intelligence uses a series of objective, maximal performance measures.

In their formative work, Mayer et al. (1999) developed a performance measure of emotional intelligence called the Multi-Factor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS). The MEIS model included four dimensions: (a) emotional perception, (b) emotional integration, (c) emotional understanding, and (d) emotional management. Criticism of the reliability and validity of the MEIS measure led to the development of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, Version 2.0 (MSCEIT, V2.0).
Mayer et al.’s (2002) model of emotional intelligence is an ability-based measure that assesses four distinct branches rather than dimensions of emotional intelligence. Similar to the MEIS, these branches include: (a) perceiving emotions, (b) using emotions, (c) understanding emotions, and (d) managing emotions. These branches are arranged in hierarchical order, with perceiving emotions understood to be the most basic dimension of emotional intelligence and managing emotions being the most advanced facet.

The MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2002) report provides 15 scores, including a main overall Total EIQ score, two Area EIQ scores, four Branch EIQ scores, and eight Task scores. The reliability of the MSCEIT Total EIQ score, Area scores, and Branches have been found to be good; however, the reliability of the Task scales were relatively low (Palmer, Gignac, Monocha, & Stough, 2005). The MSCEIT has a full scale reliability of .91, with area reliabilities of .90 for experiential area scores, and .85 for strategic area scores, Perceiving Branch score .91, Facilitating Branch score .79, Understanding Branch scores .80 and Managing Branch scores .83 (Mayer et al., 2002). As mentioned, Task scores were found to be less reliable as evidenced by half of the Task scores having coefficient alphas below the $\alpha = .7$ criterion (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003), as such caution when interpreting test scores at the task level is needed. The MSCEIT V2.0 has a test-retest reliability of $r (60) = .86$ (Brackett & Mayer, 2001). Mayer et al. (2003) reported that “factor analyses indicated that one-, two-, and four-factor models provide viable representations of the EI domain, as assessed by the MSCEIT V2.0” (p. 104).

As discussed previously, the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2002) utilizes performance measures to assess an individual’s emotional intelligence. The MSCEIT does not allow
self-report or self-identified emotional intelligence qualities and characteristics. Because the MSCEIT actually tests an individual’s ability to recognize emotions, the MSCEIT is less susceptible to socially desirable responses. This performance measure helps establish the MSCEIT as a credible assessment of emotional intelligence as an ability rather than as a trait.

**Mixed-measures models.** In contrast to the ability model, mixed-measure emotional intelligence models view emotional abilities as a combination of personality, motivation, and affective dispositions. Mixed model approaches generally utilize self-reported data that correlate with dimensions of pre-established personality theories. Given that this approach relies upon self-reported data, researchers have challenged the reliability of the mixed model approach due to the higher likelihood of socially desirable responses (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Day & Carroll, 2008).

The most commonly used mixed-measure model of Emotional Intelligence is the Bar-On (2004, 2007) model of emotional-social intelligence. Bar-On introduced the term “emotional quotient” (EQ) to represent the concept of emotional intelligence. According to Bar-On (2005), emotional-social intelligence, or EQ, is a combination of interrelated emotional and social competencies and skills that determine how effectively individuals understand and communicate their needs, how they understand others, and how they relate to others.

The Bar-On model of emotional-social intelligence conceptualizes emotional intelligence as a combination of personality characteristics, emotional competencies, and temperament (Codier, 2010; Jones-Schenk & Harper, 2014, Rader, 2012; Smith, Profetto-McGrath, & Cummings, 2009). As a mixed-measures model, emotional intelligence is
considered to be a combination of abilities and non-ability traits. Bar-On’s model defines emotional intelligence as effectively understanding oneself and others, relating well to others, and adapting to one’s environment (Bar-On, 2000). The Bar-on EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997) is of 133 Likert-type items that assess the degree to which respondents feel, think, or act in various situations, where response options range from 1 (Never/Rarely) to 5 (Almost/Always). The model measures 15 competencies organized into five components: (a) intrapersonal—includes the factors of self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualization; (b) interpersonal—includes empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships; (c) stress management—includes stress tolerance and impulse control; (d) adaptability—includes reality testing, flexibility, and problem solving; and (e) general mood—includes optimism and happiness (Bar-On, 2005). Reliability studies indicated an overall average internal consistency coefficient of .76 (Bar-On, 1997), with test-retest reliability of a sample collected in South Africa reporting an average coefficient of .85 after 1 month and .75 after 4 months (DeWeerdt & Rossi, 2012).

Bar-On’s model differs from the MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2002) model, in that Bar-On is a self-report test that provides an estimate of one’s emotional and social intelligence, making the instrument susceptible to socially desirable responses. As the desire for the current study was to assess maximum-performance, the Bar-On EQ-I was not selected as a measure.

**Trait emotional intelligence.** In contrast to Mayer and Salovey’s contention that emotional intelligence is an ability that works in concert with cognition, Petrides and Furnham (2001) maintained an individual’s personality, or emotional self-efficacy, plays
a role in one’s emotional intelligence. As such, Petrides and Furnham asserted that emotional intelligence must be measured differently than the ability model. According to Petrides and Furnham (2001), emotional self-efficacy cannot be measured by cognitive testing; rather, only self-reporting can be used to assess emotional self-efficacy. Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001, 2003) viewed emotional intelligence as a basic personality trait that does not necessarily require higher-order cognition.

To assess trait emotional intelligence, Petrides and Furnham (2001) developed the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). Trait emotional intelligence is defined as a “constellation of emotional-related self-perceptions and dispositions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies” (Petrides, Furnham, & Mavroveli, 2007, p. 151). Trait emotional intelligence includes affect-related behavioral tendencies and self-perceived abilities.

The TEIQue is comprised of 153 items, organized into 15 subscales, four factors, and a global trait emotional intelligence (Perez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005). Developed as a result of a comprehensive content analysis of prominent literature on EI, the 15 subscales consist of adaptability, assertiveness, emotion appraisal (self and others), emotion expression, emotion management (others), emotion regulation, impulsiveness (low), relationship skills, self-esteem, self-motivation, social competence, stress management, trait empathy, trait happiness, and trait optimism (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). These 15 subscales lead to scoring for four broader factors that include well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. The TEIQue has been deemed to have good psychometric properties (.92 for the Global trait EI; Petrides, 2009); however, concerns about the TEIQue’s lack of objective metrics and reliance on self-report exist.
(Arora et al., 2010). Because the TEIQue lacks objective metrics and relies on self-reports that increase the chance of socially desirable answers, the TEIQue was not selected for use in the current study.

In summary, there are numerous definitions of and approaches to assessing emotional intelligence; each model has its limitations and has been criticized for deficiencies in validity. The origin of the criticisms stems from the fact that researchers continue to debate whether emotional intelligence is an ability (intelligence; Mayer et al., 2003), a personality trait (Petrides & Furnham, 2003), or a blend of both ability and trait (Bar-On, 2005). The MSCEIT is the only performance-based reliable assessment and, therefore, was selected for this study given that the MSCEIT tests the actual ability of individuals to perceive and decipher emotions rather than relying on self-reported information, which can increase response bias.

**Conclusion**

Graduating competent social workers is a primary goal and responsibility of the Council on Social Work (CSWE)-accredited schools of social work. Assessment of the suitability of applicants for social work programs is not limited to just the admissions process; rather, assessment of suitability for study and the profession must occur throughout the program. Given that cognitive abilities are important factors to consider when admitting applicants into a Master of Social Work program, due to homogeneous applicant pools, further consideration of non-cognitive factors as predictors of success is warranted. Assessing emotional intelligence, as one non-cognitive measure may help identify more suitable social work students.
Additionally, a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes student success within an MSW program is also warranted. Utilizing a holistic approach to identifying the factors that predict student success, such as the factors identified within the Thriving Quotient, may help schools of social work better understand which attributes lead to student thriving in their respective degree programs. This study therefore considered the role emotional intelligence has in predicting success in an MSW program, as well as addressing the following questions:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?

3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this predictive correlational study was to investigate the extent to which emotional intelligence contributed to the variance in student success within a Master of Social Work program. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing one year of curriculum in a Master of Social work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?

3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?
**Research Design**

A predictive correlational design using hierarchical multiple regression analysis was selected to investigate the extent to which the emotional intelligence levels of Master of Social Work (MSW) students contributed to the variance in their success after completing 1 year in the program. Correlational design allows investigators to “predict scores and explain the relationship between variables” (Creswell, 2005, p. 325). Correlational design explains the proportion of variance in the criterion variable that is accounted for by the predictor variables (Kachigan, 1991). An advantage of utilizing a correlational design is that multiple variables can be examined in one study (Mertens, 2005). Therefore, this study explored the contribution of the predictor variables of student emotional intelligence scores (at program entrance and upon the conclusion of 1 year in the MSW program), age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate academic major to the criterion variables of graduate GPA, field practice competency cumulative mean score, and Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) total mean score and the five subscale mean scores.

Multiple regression is an analysis strategy used to explain or predict a dependent (criterion) variable with two or more independent (predictor) variables (Petrocelli, 2003). For this study, to determine the best combination of predictors of student success, three regression analyses utilizing two blocks of predictor variables were conducted to assess the ability of each predictor variable to account for the variance in three types of student success outcomes: grades, field competency, and thriving. The use of hierarchical multiple regression allows predictor variables to be examined in a particular order (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). In this model, demographic variables and pre-program
factors (age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major) were entered as the first block of the equation, followed by pre-enrollment emotional intelligence total scores as the second block. Replicating the first model’s first block (comprised of demographic variables and pre-program factors, emotional intelligence total scores after completing 1 year in an MSW program) was then utilized as the second block in the second model.

The criterion variables were the student success outcomes of cumulative graduate GPA after 1 year of MSW coursework, field practice competency mean scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) mean total scores.

A secondary analysis was conducted to answer the fourth research question—to what degree does emotional intelligence change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program? A paired samples t test compared the means of students’ pre-enrollment emotional intelligence total scores and their emotional intelligence total scores after completing 1 year of the MSW program. This test computed the difference between the values of the two variables to determine if a student’s level of emotional intelligence significantly differed after completing 1 year of an MSW program.

Limitations within this research design exist. It is important to note that correlation does not imply causation (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2007). Thus, the results of multiple regression analysis cannot be interpreted as establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Although correlation cannot establish causation, multiple regression can assess the predictive reliability of the independent variable (Field, 2009)—hence the rationale for using this statistical analysis approach.
Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of full-time students admitted into the first year of the traditional track MSW program and the first year of the advanced standing track MSW program \( (N = 51) \); all participants attended the same university. There are approximately 470 graduate students enrolled in the School of Social Work at the institution, which is a public research university located in the northeast United States. The potential sample size was 150 enrolled first-year MSW graduate students. Utilizing Creswell’s (2005) recommendation of 10 to 15 participants per predictor variable, I needed a minimum of 50 students to participate.

The School of Social Work offers two degrees—a Ph.D. in Social Welfare and the Master of Social Work. Within the MSW, there are five enrollment options for students: (a) full-time traditional, (b) part-time traditional, (c) full-time advanced standing, (d) part-time advanced standing, and (e) part-time online. To achieve advanced standing enrollment, students must have earned a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) with a minimum GPA of 3.0. All other enrollment options require a bachelor’s degree with a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0. The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is not a requirement of admission for this MSW program.

This sample was selected primarily based on the availability of the student population to the researcher and opportunities within the researcher’s professional role that prompted an interest in exploring the potential role that emotional intelligence might have in explaining the variation of student success within this particular MSW program. To increase total sample size, all incoming full-time first-year students entering the MSW program were invited to participate. Because part-time students do not complete a field
practicum in their first year of study, assessing field practice competencies within this population of student was not possible; therefore, part-time students were excluded from this study. Participation in the research project was voluntary. Two incentives were utilized. The first incentive of three $50 Amazon gift cards was utilized in phase one of the initial data collection. Three students, randomly selected utilizing a random number generator, were provided the gift cards at the conclusion of phase one. As a secondary incentive, $5 coffee gift cards were provided to all students who completed the second and final phase of data collection. Fifty-one students were provided a $5 coffee gift card.

Although gender was not used as a predictor variable, this sample consisted of 83% females and 17% males. The average age of participants was 27 years. A summary of historical enrollment demographics for this school of social work for the 2 years preceding this study is presented in Table 2. Based on these historical enrollment trends, the sample was consistent with past historical enrollment demographics. As is evident in Table 1, the racial composition of the target population is predominantly White. Due to the relatively small sample size of non-White students, race was not utilized as a predictive variable in this study. Similarly, due to the relatively small population of out-of-state and non-domestic students, residency status was not a predictor variable.

**Instrumentation**

**Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test**

To assess participants’ emotional intelligence, each student completed the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT V2.0; Mayer et al., 2002). The MSCEIT was selected because it is the most widely-used measure of the ability-based model of Emotional Intelligence (EI). Measuring for ability assesses an individual’
individual’s performance level on task, whereas “self-report measures are filtered through a person’s self-concept and impression management motives” (Mayer et al., 2002, p. 405). On a scale of 1 (definitely not present) to 5 (definitely present), respondents rated the amount of specific emotion they perceived with a stimulus item (e.g., a picture of an individual or scenario). Because MSCEIT scores assess participants’ actual ability at solving emotional problems, participants’ self-concept, response set, emotional state, and other potential covariates do not affect MSCEIT results (Mayer et al., 2002).

The MSCEIT V2.0 is a 141-item ability test “intended to measure four branches, or skill groups, of emotional intelligence (EI): (a) perceiving emotions accurately, (b) using emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotion, and (d) managing emotion” (Mayer et al., 2003, p. 97). The MSCEIT produces 15 main scores and three supplemental scores. The main scores include a total EI score, two area scores, four

Table 2

Historical Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
<td>1.69%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>11.33%</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
<td>12.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American- American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1.13%</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>2.26%</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>3.39%</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>14.69%</td>
<td>7.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73.33%</td>
<td>71.19%</td>
<td>77.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-State (Domestic)</td>
<td>88.67%</td>
<td>92.66%</td>
<td>90.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>3.95%</td>
<td>4.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>7.33%</td>
<td>3.39%</td>
<td>4.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
branch scores, and eight task scores. The two area scores encompass the Experiential Emotional Intelligence Quotient and the Strategic Emotional Intelligence Quotient. The four branch scores are Perceiving Emotions, Facilitating Thought, Understanding Emotion, and Managing Emotion. The eight Task scores are Faces, Pictures, Sensations, Facilitation, Blends, Changes, Emotion Management, and Emotional Relationships. The three supplemental scores are Scatter score (the amount of fluctuation among Task scores), Positive-Negative Bias score (the degree to which the respondent perceives positive or negative emotions), and Omission score (the percentage of questions not answered).

The MSCEIT can be scored through general consensus or by expert criterion. When using general consensus scoring, each respondent’s rated perception of the amount and type of emotion present is compared for agreement with fellow respondent-raters (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990). General consensus scoring provides the respondent’s correctness on the assessment compared to other respondents within the same population. Higher scores indicate more frequent consensus with fellow respondents.

Expert criterion scoring establishes a respondent’s correctness on the test as judged by expert standards (Multi-Health Systems Inc. [MHS], 2013). Employing 21 members of the International Society for Research on Emotions (ISRE), these scorers evaluate and determine the best and worst test answers (Emotional Intelligence Skills Group, n.d.b). To test for differences in scoring, Mayer et al. (2001) had 2,000 participant scores on the MSCEIT calculated by both general and expert consensus scoring. The inter-correlation between both sets of scores was $r = .98$. Further analysis
found the MSCEIT’s overall internal consistency, utilizing the split-half reliability coefficient, is $r = .93$ for general consensus scoring and .91 for expert scoring (Mayer, 2012), while area reliability is $r = .86$ for general consensus scoring and .90 for expert scoring, and branch score reliability is $r = .76$ for general consensus scoring and .91 for expert scoring (Mayer et al., 2004). Mayer and Salovey (2012) asserted that the “two scoring methods essentially produced highly similar scoring keys [that] were nearly indistinguishable from one another ($r = .96$ to .98)” (p. 404); thus, general consensus scoring was chosen for this study. Because this research study sought to identify predictors of success within a particular group of MSW students (first-year students), utilizing the general consensus scoring method allowed for assessing the respondent’s correctness on the MSCEIT compared to other respondents within the same population. Table 3 provides guidelines for interpreting MSCEIT scores.

Table 3

*Guidelines of Interpreting MSCEIT Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Score Range</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69 or less</td>
<td>Consider Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-89</td>
<td>Consider Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>Low Average Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-109</td>
<td>High Average Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110-119</td>
<td>Competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120-129</td>
<td>Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130+</td>
<td>Significant Strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduate Student Thriving Quotient

As one of three criterion variables used to measure student success in this study, participants completed the graduate version of the Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Given that the Graduate Thriving Quotient emerged from the thriving research conducted with undergraduate students utilizing the Thriving Quotient (TQ; Schreiner, 2012), it is important to understand the history and development of the TQ.

The TQ (Schreiner, 2012) assesses optimal functioning of “students’ academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal engagement and well-being” (p. 5). The TQ was constructed utilizing public domain research instruments that had established reliability and validity (Schreiner, 2012). In 2008, researchers piloted the initial TQ, a 198-item instrument, with 2,474 undergraduate students across 13 institutions (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009). Upon the completion of two respective statistical analyses of the pilot instrument, which included hierarchical multiple regression and exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, the instrument was refined to 32 items (Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 2009; Schreiner, Pothoven, et al., 2009). Further analysis resulted in the finalized 25-item TQ instrument that is currently being used with traditional undergraduate student populations (Schreiner, 2012).

The TQ is a reliable and valid instrument. The TQ measures thriving across five factors: Engaged Learning ($\alpha = .83$), Academic Determination ($\alpha = .82$), Positive Perspective ($\alpha = .83$), Social Connectedness ($\alpha = .82$), and Diverse Citizenship ($\alpha = .80$). The internal consistency of the instrument is $\alpha = .89$, which attests to the instrument’s reliability (Schreiner, 2012). Participants respond to items using a 6-point Likert scale.
To expand the possibilities of measuring student success among graduate students, the TQ was tested with 2,175 graduate student respondents; an exploratory factor analysis was conducted with 840 respondents to establish internal reliability, and a missing values analysis and replacement was utilized with 768 respondents, thereby establishing the measurement model of graduate student thriving (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Upon conclusion of the analysis, the TQ assessment for graduate students was revised as an 18-item assessment. The Graduate Thriving Quotient has an internal reliability of $\alpha = .86$. The internal consistencies for the five factors within the Graduate Thriving Quotient are Engaged Learning ($\alpha = .87$), Academic Determination ($\alpha = .78$), Positive Perspective ($\alpha = .73$), Social Connectedness ($\alpha = .79$), and Diverse Citizenship ($\alpha = .77$; Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis indicates the Graduate Thriving Quotient fits a national sample of graduate students as evidenced by its internal consistency and the ability for the five distinct psychosocial factors in the model to be malleable and, therefore, amenable to institutional and programmatic interventions (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013).

**Variables**

The following section provides information explaining the criterion and predictor variables in this study. Table 4 provides the definition, scale of measurement, and coding process for the variables considered in this study.

The criterion and predictor variables were selected based on findings in the literature as outlined in Chapter 2. Student success within a Master of Social Work program involves evidencing both high functioning cognitive and non-cognitive competencies. These competencies are measured in three ways: (a) acquired knowledge
Table 4

**Variable Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Variable</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criterion Measures:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>This interval level measurement, on a 0 to 4 scale, represents the cumulative grade point (GPA) average of all courses students took within their first year of the Master of Social Work program. The cumulative GPA is calculated by the university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS</td>
<td>At this university, six competencies are measured during the first-year field practicum. Competencies are measured utilizing an ordinal level measurement where 0 = unacceptable progress (UP), 1 = insufficient progress (IP), 2 = emerging competence (EC), 3 = competence (C), and 4 = advanced competence (AC). The total mean score of the six competencies was utilized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTQ</td>
<td>The Graduate Thriving Quotient measures thriving among five factors utilizing an ordinal level measurement 6-point Likert scale response (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree). The total mean scores from each factor and the cumulative total mean score for the TQ instrument was utilized. The five factors are assessed by the following criterion: Engaged Learning (EL) - Please rate your agreement with each of the items: (EL1) I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person. (EL2) I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life. (EL3) I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class. (EL4) I feel energized by the ideas I am learning in most of my classes. Academic Determination (AD) – Please rate your agreement with each of the items: (AD5) Once I start a project, I stick with it until I am finished. (AD6) I am good at juggling all the demands of life. (AD7) Other people would say I'm a hard worker. (AD8) I find a way to get everything done for classes that I need to do in a given week. (AD9) I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success. Social Connectedness (SC) - Please rate your agreement with each of the items: (SC10) I find the relationships in my life difficult. (SC11) I don’t have as many close friends as I wish I had. (SC12) Other people seem to make friends more easily than I do. Diverse Citizenship (DC) - Please rate your agreement with each of the items: (DC13) I spend time making a difference in other people’s lives. (DC14) I know I can make a difference in my community. (DC15) I speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. (DC16). It’s important for me to make a contribution to my community. Positive Perspective (PP) - Please rate your agreement with each of the items: (PP17) My perspective on life is that I tend to see the glass as “half full.” (PP18) I always look on the bright side of things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictor Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block One</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>This interval-level measurement, on a 0 to 4 scale, represents the cumulative grade point (GPA) average of all courses the student completed to acquire his/her undergraduate degree. The cumulative GPA was calculated by the undergraduate university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Academic Major</td>
<td>1 = social work undergraduate major, 0 = non-social work undergraduate major.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographics: Age</td>
<td>Utilizing date of birth, obtained from the students’ admissions application, age was calculated at the point of enrollment into the Master of Social Work program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Block Two (each variable run separately for each model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI-1</th>
<th>Total sum emotional intelligence score (recorded at the start of the MSW program).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EI-2</td>
<td>Total sum emotional intelligence score (at the conclusion of first year of study).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as evidenced by a student’s GPA, (b) demonstrating knowledge by receiving high field practice competency scores, and (c) overall academic and psychosocial well-being as evidenced by a high Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) total mean score. To explain the variance of student success among students enrolled in a Master of Social Work program, the three criterion variables of GPA at the conclusion of the first year in an MSW program, mean field competency score at the conclusion of 1 year in field practicum, and the mean Graduate Thriving Quotient total score were used. The predictor variables in this study contained two blocks. Block one consisted of undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major, and demographic variables of age of the student. Block two comprised the total Emotional Intelligence score at the two points of time within the study: (a) at the point of enrollment in the MSW program, and (b) at
the conclusion of the first year within the MSW program. To avoid multicollinearity, each point in time was run separately within the regression model.

Due to limitations within the sample populations, demographics such as race, sex, household income, and residency status were not utilized as variables because the population lacked a large enough representative sample within each category to accurately conduct analysis. Further, although studies reported in the literature indicate that undergraduate institutional quality is a predictor of success within graduate schools of social work, the lack of variation in undergraduate institutions quality from which this school of social work recruits did not allow a sufficiently robust analysis to determine if undergraduate institutional quality would be a predictor of success. Historically, students who seek their advanced degree from this school of social work come from regional institutions characterized by similar profiles of institutional quality.

**Procedures**

This study was conducted over the course of 1 academic year. Students were invited via e-mail to participate in two phases of the study. The first phase was conducted within the first months (September/October) of their academic coursework, and the second phase was conducted at the end of the first academic year (April/May). Students individually completed the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT version 2; Mayer et al., 2002) online survey both at phase one and two of the study. Students were provided access to the MSCEIT through an encrypted Multi Health Systems website that required participants to enter an access code provided by the researcher. In addition to taking the MSCEIT in phase two, participants completed the Graduate Thriving Quotient (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) via an encrypted
SurveyMonkey web link (http://www.surveymonkey.com). Data from both assessments were exported from each website into an Excel spreadsheet and then imported into SPSS v. 23 for analysis.

Informed consent disclosing the student’s rights and the nature of the study was obtained from each student who chose to participate. Student university identification numbers were used to match the emotional intelligence measurement results and the Graduate Thriving Quotient measurement results with the cumulative grade point average and field practice competency scores at the conclusion of the first year of the MSW program. Within the informed consent, I requested permission from participants to allow me to access their final first-year cumulative GPA, total field practice competency scores, and obtain the demographic information of age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major from admissions records. Utilizing the student identification number, I requested a graduate GPA and demographic report of participants from the School of Social Work Registrar. The researcher also requested a field competency score report from the Field Education Director. These reports provided the cumulative graduate GPA for the first year, field competency scores, and demographics, but did not include any student names or other identifiable information. Due to my professional role as researcher and to avoid any conflicts of interest, I employed a research assistant to match the data sets into one comprehensive data set. Once the information was matched, the student’s identification number was deleted and each student had been numerically coded, the data set was provided to me. All data collected were secured and locked in my office. Data were accessible only to me, the researcher’s assistant, and my dissertation methodologist.
Chapter 3 presented the research methodology utilized to determine the extent to which Emotional Intelligence contributes to the variance in student success outcomes such as GPA, practice competency scores, and thriving. By determining if a relationship exists between emotional intelligence and student success, it was hoped that social work education administrators might be afforded deeper insight into developing strategies to recruit and admit students who would be better suited for both the academic program and profession. Additionally, curriculum could be modified to strengthen the development of emotional intelligence in MSW students.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of the statistical analysis discussed in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which emotional intelligence accounts for the variation in student success within a Master of Social Work program. Student success was operationalized as cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores measured at the completion of one year of a Master of Social Work curriculum. Additionally, this study sought to investigate whether emotional intelligence changed significantly after completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program. The results of the analyses conducted addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?
3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?

**Data Screening**

A preliminary screening of all the data collected was conducted to ensure the quality of the data (Mertler & Vannatta, 2009). The data were examined for any missing, partial, or inaccurate information, as well as for normality and outliers.

**Missing Data**

To be included in the study, participants had to complete the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) at the start of their MSW program and at the conclusion of their first year in the MSW program. In addition, participants completed the Graduate Thriving Quotient (GTQ; Petridis & Schreiner, 2013) at the end of their first year in the program. Sixty-six students completed the pretest of the MSCEIT in the beginning of the fall 2014 semester. Of those 66 students, 51 completed the Graduate Thriving Quotient and the posttest MSCEIT assessment at the end of the spring 2015 semester. Only those who completed all three assessments were included in this study.

Demographic and grade reports were obtained from the school Registrar and Field Education office for the 51 participants. The demographic variables and grade reports had less than 1% missing cases. Missing data were handled through listwise deletion during the regression analysis.
Outliers, Normality, Linearity, and Homoscedasticity

To determine that the multivariate analysis accurately represented the study population, data were examined to identify any univariate or multivariate outliers. Outliers may represent extreme or non-representative values for variables that may result from errors in data entry or responses from a participant that significantly differ from other participant responses. Outliers pose a threat to statistical analysis because they can distort the findings (Mertler & Vannatta, 2009).

Mahalanobis distance was utilized to identify any multivariate outliers in the data set. Utilizing a chi-square critical value for 40 df at the .001 level of 66.67, it was determined that no multivariate outliers existed. In assessing for univariate outliers, a conservative approach was used due to the relatively small sample size. Applying a Z score of 4 or more, data were analyzed, and it was determined that no univariate outliers existed.

Assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were examined to determine whether the data significantly violated these assumptions. Normality was assessed by examining histograms and normality plots. The assumption of normality was satisfied as assessed by visual inspection of Normal Q-Q Plots. Linearity assumes there is a “straight line relationship between two variables” (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p. 32). The residual plot indicated a linear relationship between variables, meeting the assumptions of linearity. Homoscedasticity assumes the variability in scores around the regression line are approximately equal to the variability of the predictor variable. An examination of the residual plots determined the assumption of homoscedasticity was met.
In addition to examining the data for assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, multicollinearity among predictor variables was assessed to prepare the data for the hierarchical multiple regressions. Utilizing a tolerance level of 0.10 and variance inflation factor of 10, it was determined that multicollinearity did exist between the predictor variables of pre-program emotional intelligence total scores and end-of-year (post) emotional intelligence scores. As a result, the regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses utilizing only two blocks (pre-program factors, pre-test EI score or post-test EI score) for each analysis rather than the originally proposed three block model (pre-program factors, pre-test EI score, and post-test EI score).

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

To investigate the contributions of emotional intelligence to the variance in each student’s success outcome, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. The student success outcome variables of cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores were independently used as the criterion variables. For each criterion variable, separate hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted. The first regression model involved the pre-program predictors and pre-test EI scores. The second regression model involved the pre-program predictors and post-test EI scores.

The predictor variables were entered in two blocks in the same order for each regression. The pre-program predictors of age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major were entered into block one to statistically control for entering characteristics (undergraduate GPA, undergraduate academic major, and age). The second block of the regression model included students’ emotional intelligence scores, either at the pre-test or
post-test. Separate regression models were conducted using the pre- or post-test scores.

Table 5 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for pre-program predictors, cumulative graduate GPA, field competency scores, pre- and post- MSCEIT scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scale scores. Table 6 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for all Graduate Thriving Quotient items used in this study.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>27.10</td>
<td>9.107</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>3.523</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Graduate GPA</td>
<td>3.729</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Practice Competency Scores</td>
<td>3.248</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test MSCEIT Total Standard Score^</td>
<td>94.78</td>
<td>11.987</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test MSCEIT Total Standard Score^</td>
<td>92.13</td>
<td>15.418</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Thriving Quotient Total Mean Score</td>
<td>4.695</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Learning Factor Score</td>
<td>5.049</td>
<td>.669</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Determination Factor Score</td>
<td>5.012</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse Citizenship Factor Score</td>
<td>4.869</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Perspective Factor Score</td>
<td>4.402</td>
<td>1.058</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness Factor Score</td>
<td>3.719</td>
<td>1.046</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ^not utilized in the same regression equation. Each conducted individually with pre-program predictors.*
Table 6

Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Graduate Thriving Quotient Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Thriving Quotient Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person.</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>.790</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life.</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class.</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>.810</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel energized by the ideas I am learning in most of my classes.</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.953</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once I start a project, I stick with it until I am finished.</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>.895</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people would say I'm a hard worker.</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>.771</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to apply my strengths to achieve academic success.</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good at juggling all the demands of life.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1.046</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find a way to get everything done for classes that I need to do in a given week.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong in this graduate program.</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>1.076</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people seem to make friends more easily than I do.</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.381</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a student in this program fills an important need in my life.</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have as many close friends as I wish I had.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.455</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the relationships in my life difficult.</td>
<td>2.647</td>
<td>1.180</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend time making a difference in other people's lives.</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel proud of the college or university I have chosen to attend.</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>.840</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family encourages me to complete my degree.</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.126</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a strong sense of community among students in my program.</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.243</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My close friends encourage me to continue attending graduate school.</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>.891</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know I can make a difference in my community.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spiritual or religious beliefs provide me with a sense of strength when life is difficult.</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.570</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always look on the bright side of things.</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.140</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spiritual or religious beliefs are the foundation of my approach to life.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.543</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My perspective on life is that I tend to see the glass as &quot;half full,&quot; rather than &quot;half empty.&quot;</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.102</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gain spiritual strength by trusting in a higher power beyond myself.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have found that my graduate program is a good fit for me.</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I regularly talk with my family about what I'm learning in my graduate program.</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.255</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty in my program don't seem to have time for me.</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.166</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My overall experience in this program has been positive.</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.932</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are treated with respect by the faculty in my program.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty in my program are more interested in their own research than in student learning.</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am comfortable talking to the faculty in my department about my career choices.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that the amount of money I'm paying for graduate school is worth it in the long run.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to complete my graduate degree at this institution.</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Thriving Quotient Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$N$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If I had to do it over again, I would choose a different college/university to attend.</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.059</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy being a student here.</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given my current goals, this program is a good fit for me.</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>.774</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each regression model, $F$-tests were examined to determine whether the relationship between the criterion variables and the predictor variables was linear. The squared multiple correlation ($R^2$) was examined to ascertain the amount of variance in the student success outcomes of cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores that was contributed by the predictor variables. For each criterion variable, two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted, one utilizing pre-EI as a predictor variable and one utilizing post-EI as a predictor variable (see Tables 7 to 14).

**Cumulative Graduate GPA**

A multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed utilizing cumulative graduate GPA as the criterion and the pre-program variables of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, cumulative undergraduate major, and pre-test EI scores as predictors to determine the amount of variation in cumulative graduate GPA that could be explained as a function of pre-program factors. The analysis was not statistically significant $F(4,46) = .606, p = .660$, indicating pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and pre-EI scores are not predictors of cumulative graduate GPA (see Table 7).

A second multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed to determine if cumulative graduate GPA could be predicted as a function of the pre-program factors of
Table 7

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Cumulative Graduate GPA*

*Utilizing Pre-EI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>-.109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ Change 

$R^2$ 

age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and post-test EI scores. This analysis was also not statistically significant $F(4,46) = 1.061, p = .386$, indicating pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and post-test EI scores are not predictors of cumulative graduate GPA (see Table 8).

Table 8

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Cumulative Graduate GPA utilizing Post-EI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>-.061</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>-.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ Change 

$R^2$ 

74
Field Practice Competency Scores

A multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed with field practice competency scores as the criterion and pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, cumulative undergraduate major, and pre-test EI scores as predictors to determine if the variation in field practice competency scores could be explained by pre-program factors. Although the final model was not statistically significant $F(4,44) = 2.332, p = .071$, the first block of the model containing the pre-program demographic characteristics was significant $F(3,45) = 3.086, p = .037$. The first block accounted for 10% of the variability in field practice competency scores, as indexed by $\Delta R^2$, and pre-test EI explained an additional .4% of the variance in field practice competency scores after controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major. Undergraduate GPA, as indexed by its $\beta$ value of .359, was a significant predictor of field practice competency scores (see Table 9).

A second multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed to determine if field practice competency scores could be predicted as a function of the pre-program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>.334</td>
<td>.251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Pre-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$ Change</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *$p < .05$. 

Table 9
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Field Practice Competency Scores Utilizing Pre-EI
factors of age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and the post-test EI scores.

Once again, although the total model was not statistically significant $F(4,44) = 2.317, p = .072$, the first block of the model containing the pre-program demographic characteristics was significant $F(3,45) = 3.086, p = .037$. The first block of the model accounted for 9.9% of the variability, as indexed by the $\Delta R^2$ statistic, and post-test EI explained an additional .3% of the variance in field practice competency scores, after controlling for age, undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major. Within this model, the variable undergraduate GPA, as indexed by its $\beta$ value of .355, was a significant predictor of field practice competency scores (see Table 10).

**Graduate Thriving Quotient Total Mean Scores**

A multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed utilizing Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores as the criterion and the pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, cumulative undergraduate major, and pre-test EI scores as predictors to determine if the variation in Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean

Table 10

**Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Field Practice Competency Scores**

**Utilizing Post-EI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>-.225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>.869</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.355*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.251</td>
<td>.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Block 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ Change</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $^*p < .05.$
scores could be explained as a function of pre-program factors. The model was not statistically significant $F(4,46) = 1.979, p = .113$, indicating that pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and pre-test EI scores were not predictors of Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. However, the pre-EI scores, as indexed by a $\beta$ value of .302, were a significant predictor of Graduate Thriving Quotient total means scores (see Table 11).

To further explore the relationship between pre-EI and graduate student thriving, a regression was performed using Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores as the criterion and pre-test EI as the independent variable. The analysis was found to be statistically significant $F(1,49) = 5.043, p = .029$, indicating that pre-program EI is a predictor of students’ ability to thrive in an MSW program. Pre-test EI accounted for 9.3% of the variance in student thriving. To decipher in which areas of thriving pre-EI had the strongest relationship, additional regressions were conducted utilizing each of the five thriving factors as the criterion and pre-test EI as the independent variable. Of the

Table 11

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Graduate Thriving Quotient Total Mean Scores Utilizing Pre-EI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>-.142</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>-.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>.177</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 2</td>
<td>Pre-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.302*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$ Change</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $^*p < .05.$
five analyses conducted, two were found to be statistically significant: Engaged Learning $F(1,49) = 4.729, p = .035$ and Social Connectedness $F(1,49) = 5.592, p = .022$. Pre-test EI scores accounted for 8.8% of the variance in Engaged Learning ($\beta = .297, p < .05$) and 10.2% of the variance in Social Connectedness ($\beta = .320, p < .05$).

To determine if Graduate Thriving Quotient Total Mean scores could be predicted as a function of the pre-program factors of age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and post-test EI scores, a multiple hierarchical regression analysis was performed. This analysis was not statistically significant $F(4,46) = 1.981, p = .113$, indicating that the total model containing pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and post-test EI scores was not predictive of Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. However, post-test EI scores were a significant predictor of Graduate Thriving Quotient total means score, as indicated by a $\beta$ value of .301 (see Table 1).

Given that post-test EI was found to have a strong relationship to Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores, a regression analysis was conducted utilizing the criterion variable Graduate Thriving Quotient and post-test EI as the independent variable to further explore the relationship between these two variables. The analysis was found to be statistically significant $F(1,49) = 5.254, p = .026$, indicating that post-EI was significantly related to students’ ability to thrive in an MSW program. Post-EI accounted for 9.7% of the variance in student thriving (see Table 1). To decipher in which areas of thriving post-test EI had the strongest relationship, additional regression analyses were conducted utilizing each of the five thriving factors as the criterion and post-test EI as the independent variable. Of the five analyses
### Table 12

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Graduate Thriving Quotient Total Mean Scores Utilizing Post-EI*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 1</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate GPA</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>-.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Major</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 2</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SEB</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.301*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05.

Conducted, two were found to be statistically significant: Academic Determination $F(1,49) = 5.636, p = .022$, with an $R^2$ of .085, and Social Connectedness $F(1,49) = 5.243, p = .026$, with an $R^2$ of .078. Post-EI accounted for 10% of the variance in Academic Determination ($\beta = .321, p < .05$) and 9.7% of the variance in Social Connectedness ($\beta = .311, p < .05$).

**Pearson Correlation**

Pearson correlations were calculated to address the third research question, “How are the student success variables (cumulative Graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?” The correlation calculated between cumulative graduate GPA ($M = 3.73, SD = .226$) and field practice competency scores ($M = 3.25, SD = .769$) was found to be statistically significant (see Table 13). No statistically significant relationships were found between Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores and cumulative GPA or field practice competency scores; however, when analyzing the five factors of the Graduate Thriving Quotient...
Table 13

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Predictor and Criterion Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Graduate GPA</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Field Comp Score</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>.427**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. TQ Mean Score</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pre EI Total Score</td>
<td>94.78</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>.143</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.305*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Post EI Total Score</td>
<td>92.13</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.311*</td>
<td>.848**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Engaged Learning</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>.213</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.727**</td>
<td>.297*</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Academic Determination</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>.585</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.696**</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>.321*</td>
<td>.420**</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Diverse Citizenship</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.498**</td>
<td>.146</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Positive Perspective</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.569**</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>.364**</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Social Connectedness</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.320*</td>
<td>.732**</td>
<td>.320*</td>
<td>.311*</td>
<td>.318*</td>
<td>.336*</td>
<td>.294*</td>
<td>.291*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. p < .05*, p < .01**.
independently, a statistically significant correlation was found between field practice competency scores ($M = 3.25, SD = .769$) and Social Connectedness ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.02$) $r = .320, p < .025$.

**Paired Samples t Tests**

To address the final research question, “To what degree does emotional intelligence change after completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?”, a paired samples $t$ test was conducted. The results of the $t$ test indicated that students’ emotional intelligence levels declined significantly over the course of 1 year $t(50) = 2.297, p = .026$. To further understand this finding, paired sample $t$ tests were conducted on pre and post emotional intelligence Area, Branch, and Task scores provided by the MSCEIT data. Upon analysis, results indicated a statistically significant decline in Area Strategic Scores, Perceiving Emotions Branch Pictures Task Scores, and Understanding Emotions Branch Changes Task Scores (see Table 14). Explanations of the meanings of these areas and branch task scores are provided in Chapter 5.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of multiple analyses to address the four research questions that guided this study. Emotional intelligence scores did not contribute significantly to the variation in the student success outcomes of cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient mean scores after controlling for the pre-program attributes of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major. Cumulative undergraduate GPA was the best predictor of field practice competency scores. The total models containing pre-program characteristics and emotional intelligence scores were not significantly predictive of
Table 14

Paired Samples t Tests of EI Total Scores, Area Scores, Branch Scores, and Task Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Standard EI Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre EI</td>
<td>94.78</td>
<td>11.987</td>
<td></td>
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Note. *p = <.05, **p = <.01.
student success outcomes upon conclusion of 1 year in an MSW program; yet, there were significant relationships between pre- and post-emotional intelligence and thriving. Specifically, pre-program emotional intelligence was significantly predictive of students’ levels of Engaged Learning and Social Connectedness after a year in the program, while emotional intelligence scores at the end of the first year were significantly related to MSW students’ levels of Academic Determination and Social Connectedness. Levels of Social Connectedness at the end of the first year also were significantly related to field practice competency scores. Results of the paired samples $t$ tests indicated that over the course of 1 academic year, there was a statistically significant decline in students’ emotional intelligence. Results of these findings are further discussed in Chapter 5, in addition to limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Given that relational skills are critically important to practitioners in the field of social work to serve clients effectively (Hennessey, 2011), the curricular and field experience requirements for students earning a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree would logically focus in part on self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Indeed, Ingram (2012, 2013) and other scholars in the field have noted the importance of social workers having the ability to develop therapeutic relationships by understanding, perceiving, and managing the emotions of not only the clients, but also the social worker (Hennessey, 2011; Morrison, 2007). Yet, as the summary of relevant literature in Chapter 2 described, the role and relevance of emotional intelligence within social work education has received little research attention (Clarke, Lovelock, & McNay, 2016). In addressing this gap, this dissertation research explored the extent to which students’ levels of emotional intelligence (EI) is a significant predictor of student success for individuals enrolled in an MSW program. In part, interest in conducting this study emerged from a desire to consider whether knowledge of an MSW applicant’s EI score could be a valuable factor when assessing the applicant’s suitability for, and ability to succeed in, an MSW program.

Several research questions guided the study’s exploration of the predictive relationship between emotional intelligence and student success. It should be noted that
for this study, student success was defined as a combination of success variables: cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. The research questions were as follows:

1. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence at entry into a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success upon completion of 1 year of curriculum in the MSW program, after controlling for students’ demographic characteristics?

2. To what extent does Emotional Intelligence upon completing 1 year of curriculum in a Master of Social Work program contribute to the variance in student success in the Master of Social Work program, after controlling for demographic characteristics and entry level Emotional Intelligence?

3. How are the student success variables (GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient scores) related to each other?

4. To what extent do MSW student emotional intelligence scores change as the result of completing 1 year of curriculum in a social work program?

A correlational design was employed to conduct the study. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) was administered to 51 MSW students attending the same program at a single public research university to evaluate their levels of emotional intelligence at two points in time (pre-program and post-first year in the program); additionally, the Graduate Thriving Quotient was administered at the conclusion of 1 year of MSW coursework to assess students’ levels of thriving. Pre-program factors of age, undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and the two student success factors of cumulative graduate GPA and field competency scores were also
collected from each participant’s academic records. To examine the first two research questions, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. To more fully understand how the student success variables were related to one another (RQ 3), Pearson’s correlations were calculated. To answer the fourth research question (RQ 4), a paired samples t test was conducted.

As was presented more fully in Chapter 4, the main findings of this study indicated a student’s level of emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of student success, either at entry into an MSW program or at the conclusion of the first year of study in an MSW program. An additional and unexpected finding of this study was that participants’ levels of emotional intelligence actually declined over the course of completing 1 year of coursework, including field experience, in the MSW program.

Although this study’s student success regression model (i.e., block one containing undergraduate GPA, age, dichotomous major, and block two contained pre-program and end-of-year emotional intelligence scores—each run separately) was not a significant predictor of graduate student thriving, when block one was removed from the model, secondary findings did reveal a student’s level of emotional intelligence at entry into an MSW program was a significant predictor of Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. This finding indicates that pre-emotional intelligence predicts thriving in a graduate MSW program. Despite its decline, students’ end-of-year level of emotional intelligence was found to be significantly correlated with Graduate Thriving Quotient total means.

Further investigation into the correlations between students’ levels of emotional intelligence and graduate student thriving revealed positive correlations between
students’ pre- and post-levels of emotional intelligence with three specific Graduate Thriving Quotient scale scores: (a) Academic Determination, (b) Engaged Learning, and (c) Social Connectedness. Study findings corroborated those of earlier researchers (Cunningham, 1982; Fortune, 2003) in identifying cumulative undergraduate GPA as a positive predictor of field performance, as measured by field practice competency scores.

This chapter discusses each of these primary and secondary findings in relation to the relevant literature. Also presented are several limitations of the study. Finally, the potential implications of these findings for social work education are discussed, followed by a set of recommendations for future research in the area of emotional intelligence and student success in Master of Social Work programs.

**Discussion of Findings**

By its very nature, social work is a profession principally concerned with helping people. As such, effective relational skills are required by practitioners, including the interpersonal and intrapersonal factors associated with emotional intelligence. For this reason, the major findings of this study are somewhat perplexing. Specifically, the lack of a significant correlation between entering students’ levels of emotional intelligence and their success in a Master of Social Work program, along with the decline in MSCEIT scores over the first year of the MSW program, require further analysis and explanation. In considering these findings, several possible explanations from the literature are presented.

**Decline of Emotional Intelligence**

In reviewing the relevant literature that might explain why these students’ level of emotional intelligence declined during their first year of MSW coursework, factors to
consider include students’ prior knowledge and competencies, program influences, and aspects associated with program fatigue. According to Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000), goal-directed and information-seeking individuals such as graduate students enter into education “with a range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment and how they organize and interpret it, [impacting] their ability to remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge” (p. 10). Students’ prior experiences, knowledge, and beliefs are mediated by their self-concept or competence belief (Weidinger, Spinath, & Steinmayr, 2016). Given that each participant in this study held a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and had an expressed interest in entering a helping profession, it is reasonable to assume these students entered the MSW program with a range of pre-conceived beliefs, knowledge, and competencies that influenced how they approached, organized, and interpreted the information presented in the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test.

**Prior knowledge and competencies.** Students entering graduate school do so at varying levels of academic and professional competence. Those students who pursue graduate studies in social work presumably enter such a program with a highly developed personal self, but not necessarily a well-developed professional self (Saari, 1989). A study that assessed the variation of personal competence and mental health between first-year and second-year MSW students found those entering their first year of MSW study had significantly higher levels of personal competence (sense of coherence and self-esteem) than students entering their second year of MSW study (Ying, 2008). Likewise, in a counseling trainee development study, Mallinckrodt and Nelson (1991) found that
first-year trainees tended to score higher on the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989)—an instrument used to assess individuals’ psychotherapeutic alliance-formation abilities—than students in their second year of study. Similarly, a systematic review of 18 studies in the research literature that investigated student empathy during medical school and residency (Neumann et al., 2011) indicated a significant decline in empathy as students progressed in their medical training. Thus, the finding that students’ emotional intelligence scores actually declined between entering the MSW program and at the completion of their first year of coursework is consistent with the findings of previous similar research.

The reasons proposed by researchers for these declines vary, but they reflect certain patterns that may be helpful for understanding the findings of the current study. Ying (2008) attributed the lowered levels of personal competence at the start of the second year of MSW study to academic and fieldwork challenges experienced throughout the first year of the program. Mallinckrodt and Nelson (1991) attributed the change in WAI ratings to periods of uncertainty and a self-perceived temporary decline in skillsets as an effect of the learning process. In their systematic literature review, Neumann et al. (2011) documented four reasons for the decline in empathy in medical students as their academic preparation progressed: (a) mistreatment by supervisors or mentors (Hojat et al., 2004; Newton, Barber, Clardy, Cleveland, & O’Sullivan, 2008; Stratton, Saunders, & Elam, 2008; Thomas et al., 2007); (b) clinical training diminished students’ values of idealism, enthusiasm, and humanity as their focus changed from the humanistic aspects of medicine to technology and objectivity (Chen, Lew, Hershman, & Orlander, 2007; Hojat et al., 2004; Stratton et al., 2008); (c) lack of perceived social support, given that
time with family and friends was limited (Bellini, Baime, & Shea, 2002; Hojat et al., 2004; Stratton et al., 2008); and (d) fatigue from high workloads (Bellini et al., 2002; Chen et al., 2007; Stratton et al., 2008).

Given that individuals entering the helping professions might be assumed to be self-aware and self-giving, the findings of Ying (2008), Mallinckrodt and Nelson (1991), and Neumann et al. (2011) that also identified declines in their respective studies of personal competence, WAI scores, and empathy, seem puzzling. Individuals pursuing careers in the helping professions would logically be open to training that prepares them to be even more emotionally intelligent to serve patients and clients effectively. However, students entering such fields commonly have very high expectations for themselves (Deal, 2000; Deal & Hyde, 2004; Holman & Freed, 1987) and often hold “grandiose views of themselves as benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent” (Deal & Hyde, 2015, p. 80). Thus, high expectations and inflated views of self may explain why entering graduate students had higher self-reported levels of personal competence (Ying, 2008), higher ratings of tasks and goals on the Working Alliance Inventory (Mallinckrodt & Nelson, 1991), and higher levels of empathy (Neumann et al. 2011) in previous studies, findings that are congruent with the higher levels of ability-based emotional intelligence demonstrated in the present study.

As denoted in research findings, reasons contributing to declines in personal competence (Ying, 2008), WAI scores (Mallinckrodt & Nelson, 1991) and empathy as gleaned from Neumann et al.’s (2011) systematic literature review involving pre-professional students could be informative in explaining the finding of this study that EI declined in MSW students over the span of their first year of coursework. For the
participants in the current study, it is likely that the rigor and challenge of the MSW first-year curriculum created periods of disequilibrium in which students’ core personal and familial worldviews and beliefs were challenged, leading to a lowered self-concept and altered level of emotional competence (Litvack, Bogo, & Mishna, 2010). When these students entered the MSW program, their previous knowledge and experiences predisposed how they approached their initial completion of the MSCEIT; in contrast, students’ exposure to the MSW first-year curriculum had likely challenged their previous knowledge and beliefs. Thus, a year-long engagement with the MSW curriculum may have temporarily impacted the self-concept of these students (Deal, 2000; Saari, 1989). As a result, they questioned their knowledge to accurately answer problems, hampering the effort (Dweck, 1986) students made when they approached, analyzed, and completed the MSCEIT a year later.

An additional influential factor related to the decline of EI scores after finishing a year of MSW study may relate to the required field practica that are an important component of the first-year curriculum. As evidenced in studies assessing the empathy of medical students, clinical training appears to contribute to diminishing the humanistic aspects of medicine (Hojat et al., 2009). The workload and responsibilities involved with field practica may have predisposed students’ attention to the technical, objective, and regulatory components of field education, rather than to the humanistic aspects of providing support and care to clients. Danitz, Orsillo, Lenda, Shortway, and Block-Lerner (2016) posited that pre-professional students struggle to remain present with clients or other stakeholders in their field practica due to academic program influences (e.g., demands associated with trying to recall readings and classroom lessons relevant to
each case and being trained to be objective in professional practice). The influence of the MSW program curriculum while balancing the demands of field practica, coupled with many other life pressures, likely contributed to altering the ability of these pre-professional students to sense and respond to emotions. It is therefore important to acknowledge and understand how the MSW curriculum may influence students’ knowledge and abilities.

**Program curriculum and influence.** The demands of the academic and field practice components of an MSW curriculum are substantial (Saari, 1989) and are purposefully designed to challenge students’ pre-existing ideologies. Faculty in MSW programs are charged with the responsibility of preparing professionals for the field, more fully developing students’ social work knowledge and comprehension. As part of this developmental process, students are asked to reassess prior knowledge and become mindful of the “incomplete understandings, false beliefs, and [potential] naïve renditions of concepts” (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 10) they may have brought into the program. When students’ pre-existing views of themselves and the world are challenged by education, their level of competence—and even aspects of their mental health—become uncertain and, as a result, may temporarily decline (Deal, 2000; Home, 1997; King & Baxter Magolda, 1999; Ying, 2008).

Further, previous studies have identified the temporary uncertainty students experience as a result of the challenges associated with learning new information (Gitterman, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 1999). Many first-year MSW students’ pre-existing beliefs are quickly challenged once they begin coursework (Wilks & Spivey, 2010). Upon entering social work coursework, students often lack confidence in general
writing skills (Koncel & Carney, 1992), have anxiety about research and statistics courses (Epstein, 1987; Forte, 1995), exhibit resistance to multicultural learning (Deal & Hyde, 2004), and are uncertain about their readiness for fieldwork (Maidment, 2003). During this period of learning, students often feel ineffective and have a weakened self-concept, affecting their competency skills and mental health (Deal, 2000; Gitterman, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 1999; Knowles, 1980; Maciuika, Basseches, & Lipson, 1994). Temporary uncertainty and diminished self-concept remain present until the students experience achievements in learning where their sense of self-competence is restored (Gitterman, 2004; King & Baxter Magolda, 1999).

Although Mayer et al. (2002) stated that the results of their instrument (the MSCEIT) should not be impacted by a respondent’s self-concept, these scholars do acknowledge (Mayer et al., 2008) that individuals with lower emotional intelligence have a more difficult time reacting successfully to the demands of their environment or social expectations. As a group, participants in this study had low average emotional intelligence scores (Pre-test EI: \( M = 94.78 \), Post-test EI: \( M = 92.13 \)). Thus, the identified decline in students’ emotional intelligence may likely be explained by the fact that the first year of MSW curriculum represents a period of challenge and stretching for students characterized by considerable uncertainty, making it more difficult to react successfully to the demands of the program expectations. Overcoming the uncertainty and attaining new knowledge and competencies are often associated with elevated levels of stress accompanied by emotional and physical fatigue—another factor to consider when contemplating why students’ levels of emotional intelligence declined.
Program fatigue. The period of academic training required to prepare social workers for the profession has been perceived to be more stressful than social work practice itself (Pottage & Huxley, 1996; Tobin & Carson, 1994; Wilks & Spivey, 2010). In fact, Polson and Nida (1998) suggested that helping profession graduate programs (e.g., psychology, social work, and marriage and family therapy), for which the curriculum requires a combination of research, classroom learning, and hands-on clinical practicum training, evokes more stress than traditional graduate programs. The stress caused by the rigor and challenge of MSW curriculum can be both emotionally and physically taxing on social work students, given the body’s response to academic stress can be physical, mental, and/or emotional (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000). One factor found to contribute to elevated levels of stress for students in social work programs is fatigue (Killgore et al., 2013).

A question in the Graduate Thriving Quotient instrument asked: “How often this semester have you gotten less than 4 hours of sleep in a night?” Of the participants in this study, 61% indicated they occasionally to almost always had less than 4 hours of sleep per night. Previous research findings have indicated sleep deprivation is associated with lower total emotional intelligence scores and temporary changes in cognition (Killgore, 2010; Killgore et al., 2007; Kumar, Puranik, & Sowmya, 2016; Watling, Pawlik, Scott, Booth, & Short, 2016). However, this previous research must be interpreted with caution as the research relied on self-report measures such as the EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997), which assesses self-perceived emotional intelligence rather than ability emotional intelligence (MSCEIT, Mayer et al., 2002).
According to Mayer et al. (2002), because MSCEIT scores assess participants’ actual ability at solving emotional problems, participants’ self-concept, response set, emotional state, and other potential covariates should not affect MSCEIT results. Although Mayer et al. (2002) advised other potential covariates, such as sleep, should not affect MSCEIT scores, research regarding sleep deprivation and emotion regulation has indicated that inadequate sleep reduces neurocognitive functioning (Pilcher & Huffcutt, 1996), impairing “psychomotor skills, cognitive speed, executive attention, and working memory” (Goel, Rao, Durmer, & Dinges, 2009, p. 320). These impairments increase the chance for greater errors and omissions on cognitive tasks (Albergo, Fernandez, Zaifrani, Giunta, & Albergo, 2016) due to lowered mood, cognitive speed, memory, and increased lack of attention (Palmer & Alfano, 2016).

It should also be noted in this study, there was a difference in the amount of time it took participants to take the MSCEIT (Mayer et al. 2002) during phase one vs. phase two. In fact, it is interesting that participants took longer to take the MSCEIT in phase two than phase one, and their emotional intelligence scores declined in phase two. Reasons for the increase in time to complete the MSCEIT in phase two and its decline may in part be due to lowered attention spans caused by the end of semester fatigue. The influence of lack of sleep and the emotional and physical toll as a result of the rigor of the MSW program combined with the challenge of adapting to new learning and belief systems likely contributed to the overall decline in the scores of emotional intelligence among study participants.
Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Student Success

Given that the focus of this study was to assess the extent to which emotional intelligence would be a significant predictor of student success in an MSW program, the finding that students’ emotional intelligence scores actually declined after their first year of graduate study provides at least some insight into why this study found that neither pre- nor post-test emotional intelligence scores significantly contributed to the variance in student success outcomes after controlling for student demographics. As noted in Chapter 1, six hypotheses linked both pre- and post-test emotional intelligence scores with such student success outcomes as cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving total mean scores. It was anticipated that a student's MSCEIT scores at entry (pre-EI) into an MSW program would significantly contribute to the variance in the three student success outcomes of: (a) cumulative graduate GPA, (b) field practice competency scores, and (c) Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. It was also anticipated that a student’s MSCEIT score at the conclusion of 1 year of study in an MSW program (post-EI) would significantly contribute to the variance in the three student success outcomes. Contrary to the proposed hypotheses, after controlling for students’ pre-program factors of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major, results indicated neither pre-EI scores nor post-EI scores significantly contributed to the variance in cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, or Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores.

Had these hypotheses been supported by the findings of this study, assessing prospective MSW students’ emotional intelligence within the admissions process could
have been a valuable factor for MSW admissions representatives to consider when determining the most suitable applicants for admission into their respective programs. Further, had it been established that emotional intelligence scores at the end of the first year of the MSW program did indeed have a positive relationship with student success, then interventions and programming (e.g., during student orientation, professional development for faculty) to support and enhance the development of emotional intelligence would logically receive attention from student services professionals within MSW programs. Despite assumptions made about the relationship between various dimensions of emotional intelligence and effective social work practice, however, students’ emotional intelligence scores were not a significant predictor of student success as defined in this study.

As noted in previous research on predictors of success for social work students (Dunlap et al., 1998; Fortune, 2003; Sowbell, 2011; Sowbel & Miller, 2015), undergraduate GPA remains a reliable predictor of success within a Master of Social Work program. Additionally, in this study, undergraduate GPA was a significant predictor of students performing successfully within their field placements. For this reason, taken at face value, if schools of social work continue to narrowly define success by solely focusing on GPA, there appears to be no benefit to assessing a social work applicant’s level of ability-based emotional intelligence as a potential indicator of future academic success in an MSW program. However, if schools of social work adopt a more holistic definition of student success, such as emphasizing a student’s ability to thrive in a program, then assessing a student’s emotional intelligence at entry into an MSW program is warranted.
Secondary Findings

Even though emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of student success as measured by graduate GPA, field competency scores, and Graduate Thriving total mean scores, this study did find some relationships between pre-test and post-test emotional intelligence scores and the concept of student thriving, defined as academic engagement and performance, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal well-being (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). The concept of thriving has been shown to provide a more holistic perspective in student success of undergraduate students (Schreiner, 2010), with subsequent additional research by Petridis and Schreiner (2013) targeting the factors that contribute to thriving among graduate students.

According to Schreiner (2012), thriving represents optimal functioning through engaged learning and academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and an optimistic explanatory style. When clustered into the three domains of academic thriving, interpersonal thriving, and intrapersonal thriving, the items within the Graduate Thriving Quotient help to illuminate the various avenues of success students can achieve and experience in college. The Graduate Thriving Quotient items comprise five factors that contribute to the three domains of thriving: Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, Positive Perspective, Social Connectedness, and Diverse Citizenship (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). In this study, factors associated with academic thriving and interpersonal thriving were identified as having a positive correlation with students’ levels of emotional intelligence.

Academic thriving is measured by the Graduate Thriving Quotient factors of Engaged Learning and Academic Determination. Students who thrive academically
engage meaningfully in the learning process, evidenced by their ability to effectively process course materials and make connections between what they know, what needs to be learned, and how to apply what they have learned (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). MSW students’ scores on the Engaged Learning and Academic Determination scales were found to have a positive correlation with students’ levels of emotional intelligence in this study, both at entrance to the program and after 1 year in the program.

*Interpersonal thriving* is measured by the Graduate Thriving Quotient factors of Social Connectedness and Diverse Citizenship. Foundational to interpersonal thriving is the importance of relationships in positive life outcomes. Social Connectedness requires the ability to connect to a broader community, as well as having healthy and meaningful connections to valued others (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013). Diverse Citizenship builds on the concept of healthy relationships and involves students being open to and valuing differences in others while also desiring to make a difference in their respective communities (Petridis & Schreiner, 2013; Schreiner, 2010). In this study, only one interpersonal thriving factor—Social Connectedness—was found to have a positive correlation with emotional intelligence.

Interpersonal and academic thriving are of particular relevance for social work educators, given the dimensions of interpersonal thriving align with the social work value of recognizing the importance of human relationships (NASW, 1996) and encouraging good self-care practices, while academic thriving involves engaged learning which can serve as an indicator of a program’s effectiveness (Shulman, 2005). Understanding the factors that contribute to academic and interpersonal thriving and their relationship to student levels of emotional intelligence can assist social work educators in fostering
environments that encourage growth in emotional intelligence and subsequently student academic and personal thriving. Additionally, this knowledge may assist MSW admissions representatives to identify applicants who possess the characteristics that lead to student thriving, thereby increasing the likelihood the applicants will thrive in their MSW programs.

**Emotional Intelligence and Graduate Student Thriving**

As mentioned previously, students’ level of emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of student success, either at entry into an MSW program or at the conclusion of the first year of MSW coursework. It was identified that the entry demographic characteristics of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major were not related to the three student success outcomes in this study—cumulative graduate GPA, field competency scores, or Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. However, when block one (which contained age, undergraduate GPA, and dichotomous major) of the regression model was removed and graduate student thriving was entered as the primary outcome, even though the original proposed full student success model was not significant, the adjusted model revealed that pre-test EI was a significant predictor of graduate thriving in the MSW program. This finding suggests that students who enter the MSW program with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to thrive academically and interpersonally while in the program.

To better understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and thriving, further analyses were conducted to decipher the relationship between emotional intelligence and the five factors (i.e., Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, Positive Perspective, Social Connectedness, and Diverse Citizenship) of the Graduate
Thriving Quotient; significant positive relationships were identified. Specifically, pre-
program emotional intelligence levels were found to have a statistically significant 
positive relationship with the Graduate Thriving Quotient factors: Engaged Learning and 
Social Connectedness. Additionally, the level of students’ emotional intelligence after 
completing 1 year of MSW coursework was correlated positively (and statistically 
significantly) with two factors: Academic Determination and Social Connectedness. In 
the sections that follow, these three factors, all of which are components of student 
thriving (Schreiner, 2010, 2012; Schreiner & Louis, 2011; Schreiner, McIntosh, et al., 
2009), are presented and discussed in relationship to EI and Social Work Education.

Emotional Intelligence, Social Connectedness, and Social Work Education

The findings of a wide array of studies related to emotional intelligence suggest a 
strong positive correlation between higher levels of emotional intelligence and positive 
social functioning (Brackett et al., 2011; Extremera & Rey, 2016; Rivers, Brackett, 
Salovey, & Mayer, 2007; Zeidner & Matthews, 2016; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 
2012). In a study examining friendships between college students, Lopes and colleagues 
(2004) documented a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional 
competencies and the quality of relationships. Specifically, scores on the managing 
emotions subscale of the MSCEIT were correlated with higher self-perceived positive 
interactions with friends and family, less negative interactions, and higher emotional 
support. These relational competences align well with the Graduate Thriving Quotient 
factor of Social Connectedness, which represents the presence of healthy relationships in 
students’ lives (Schreiner, 2012). College students with high scores of Social 
Connectedness tend to surround themselves with people who are trustworthy, who listen,
and who support them through the challenges they might face in college or daily life (Stephens & Beatty, 2015).

The development of healthy and supportive relationships fosters a greater sense of belonging to a community larger than oneself (Schreiner, Kalinkewicz, McIntosh, & Cuevas, 2013), leading to greater interpersonal thriving. Social support from partners, family members, friends, and work colleagues is important for students pursuing studies in social work (Wilks, 2008). In the absence of external support, peer support within social work graduate programs assumes greater importance in student success (Moriarty, Manthorpe et al., 2009). In this study, students who had higher levels of emotional intelligence also had higher Social Connectedness scores, as indicated by self-report on the Graduate Thriving Quotient, indicating these students experienced aspects of interpersonal thriving while pursuing their MSW degree.

The extent to which student success variables were related to each other was the focus of the third research question in this study. No significant relationships were found between the student success factors of cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and the Graduate Thriving Quotient. The lack of variability in students’ cumulative graduate GPAs may explain why no significant relationships were found among the student success variables (i.e., cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores); however, a positive relationship was found between a subset of the Graduate Thriving Quotient factor—Social Connectedness and the success outcome of field practice competency scores.
Although studies have indicated that MSW students experience considerable apprehension about entering field practice (Maidment, 2003; Sun, 1999; Ying, 2011), the results of the present study indicated those participants who had adequate support and connection to family and friends tended to experience more positive outcomes in their field practicums. This finding aligns with the conclusions of previous research conducted with clinical nursing students that demonstrated positive correlations between high emotional intelligence and positive clinical performance, better coping skills, well-being, and perceived levels of competency (Codier, Kamikawa, Kooker, & Shoultz, 2009; Codier, Kooker, & Shoultz, 2008; Faguy, 2012). The present study identified a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and students’ Social Connectedness scores; findings also indicated a positive relationship between the Graduate Thriving Quotient scale of Social Connectedness and field competency scores. These identified relationships emphasize the importance of the ability to perceive and identify emotions to enable building supportive relationships. Students who have higher levels of EI are more likely to score higher in Social Connectedness and, in turn, are likely to thrive and experience positive outcomes in their field placements—a vital component of MSW curriculum.

**Emotional Intelligence, Engaged Learning, and Social Work Education**

As noted, previous research has documented that the ability to perceive and identify emotions contributes to the development of supportive relationships (Lopes et al., 2004). Social work students with higher Social Connectedness are more likely to thrive in their field practica due to the supportive relationships present in their lives.
Similar benefits relate to classroom learning, given that positive supportive relationships contribute to learning environments that foster student engagement and enhance motivation and learning (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006). Specifically, social abilities and quality relationships have been shown to help facilitate cognitive and intellectual development that strengthens academic performance (Chew, Zain, & Hassan, 2013). Concerning the role emotional intelligence has with cognitive and intellectual development, Radu (2014) suggested that the constructs associated with emotional intelligence help college students adjust to the demands of university life and influence student academic outcomes, given the interpersonal and intrapersonal components of emotional intelligence help students be more engaged and driven to learn.

Engagement in learning is a key characteristic in “best learning” (Bowen, 2005, para. 1) and is a fundamental predictor of success in college (Grier-Reed, Appleton, Rodriguez, Gauza, & Reschly, 2012; Maguire, Egan, Hyland, & Maguire, 2016; Schreiner, 2010). Previous studies documented that engaged learning positively affects students’ social, emotional, and academic learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), all of which contribute to student well-being and academic achievement outcomes (Maraichelvi & Rajan, 2013). Students who have a greater mastery of managing their emotions tend to be more successful in terms of academic outcomes due to being more efficient in controlling their anxiety, adapting to change, and being goal driven (Lanciano & Curci, 2014; Pekrun, Elliott, & Maier, 2009). Study results did find students’ levels of emotional intelligence at entry into an MSW program had a positive relationship with the Graduate Thriving Quotient factor Engaged Learning. However, this study also found no statistically significant
relationship between cumulative graduate GPA and Engaged Learning. The lack of correlation between student engagement and academic achievement might simply be explained by the fact that little variation in cumulative graduate GPA existed among student participants, limiting the statistical ability to accurately decipher a relationship.

According to Schreiner and Louis (2006), Engaged Learning is a key component of academic thriving. To engage in learning, students must invest the necessary positive energy to meaningfully process new information, connect the information to existing knowledge, and then apply the information to practice (Schreiner & Louis, 2011). Students who are psychologically present, focused, and involved are more apt to “ask good questions in class, explore ideas on their own outside of class, and often (but not always) actively participate in class discussions” (Schreiner, 2010, p. 3)—all components of engaged student learning. Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan, and Towler (2005) confirmed that psychological engagement in the learning process leads to higher learning satisfaction and enhanced critical thinking skills. Graduate students who score higher in emotional intelligence and score higher in Engaged Learning on the Graduate Thriving Quotient are therefore more likely to emotionally engage and make meaningful connections of new knowledge.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal components of emotional intelligence can influence the development of positive supportive relationships (Lopes et al., 2004), which help students better adjust to the demands of university life (Radu, 2013) and allow greater engagement in classroom learning (Wurf & Croft-Piggin, 2015). It is therefore logical that this study identified a positive relationship between students’ pre-program emotional intelligence and the Graduate Thriving Quotient factor of Engaged Learning.
Emotional intelligence is an adaptive mechanism that enables students to better manage the stress associated with achieving academic success (Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton, & Osborne, 2012). MSW students’ abilities to adequately perceive and manage both their own and others’ emotions allows a deeper critical understanding of the objectives of the curriculum which relates to engaged learning. Given that social work education encourages students to critically think about complex issues, students who are higher in emotional intelligence and more engaged in learning will more readily be able to identify issues from multiple perspectives and assess multiple options for solutions to problems.

**Emotional Intelligence, Academic Determination, and Social Work Education**

Although engaged learning is a key factor that enables students to achieve success in a class, it is also necessary for students to exhibit a high level of “academic determination” if they are to thrive academically. Academic determination is defined by investment of effort, self-regulation, mastery of environments, and the ability to utilize goal-directed thinking to achieve academic success (Schreiner, 2010). Students with enhanced emotional intelligence exhibit higher levels of self-regulation (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000), have a greater ability to adapt to their learning environments (Saklofske et al., 2012) and are goal driven in academic achievement (Perera & DiGiacomo, 2015; Radu, 2014). Graduate students proficient at setting goals, who are self-regulated learners, and have the ability to master their learning environment are students who described as having high levels of academic determination (Petridis, 2015; Petridis & Schreiner, 2013).
Students proficient in goal setting consistently demonstrate positive patterns of higher self-efficacy and self-regulated learning achievement (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Self-regulated learning, a multidimensional construct involving a systematic approach to learning through “active and sustained cognition, behaviors, and emotions” (Abar & Loken, 2010, p. 25), describes learners who use various cognitive and metacognitive strategies to control and monitor their learning and performance (Azevedo, Moos, Johnson, & Chauncey, 2010; Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Mega, Ronconi, and De Beni (2014) affirmed that emotions influence a student’s motivation and self-regulated learning, impacting student academic achievement; therefore, a student’s ability to manage his or her emotions (level of emotional intelligence) is related to his or her ability to thrive in an academic program.

Students are more likely to experience academic success when they actively master their internal and external learning environments, regularly schedule time for study and review, understand the effort needed to achieve their goals, and do not hesitate to ask questions or request help (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Given this study identified a positive correlation between students’ level of emotional intelligence at the end of their first year of coursework with Academic Determination (as measured on the Graduate Thriving Quotient), students enrolled in graduate schools of social work would benefit from meeting with their faculty frequently to ask questions or request help and attend programming that teaches various strategies for effective time management and goal setting to enhance their self-regulated learning.
Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when contemplating the findings of this study. The first limitation is the modest sample size and the impact it had on statistical analysis. Although the number of participants ($N = 51$) met Creswell’s (2005) participant per predictor variable recommendation, the small sample size increased the risk this study would be influenced by outliers and extreme values. A conservative approach was necessary when examining both multivariate and univariate outliers. Due to the limited sample size, caution should be exercised in generalizing findings to all MSW students. Further, selection bias should be considered during interpretation, given that students who opt to participate in voluntary studies are typically conscientious and responsible learners.

A second limitation of this study involves the timeline of data collection. The original timeline specified that participants would receive invitations to the first phase of the study 1 week prior to the start of their first year in the MSW program. Due to the time requirements of the institutional review board process, the study’s anticipated launch was delayed by 3 weeks. The delayed launch may have negatively impacted participation in the study, as potential participants were entrenched in their coursework, possibly limiting their availability of time and willingness to comply with a non-graded, school-related request. The second and final phase of data collection occurred at the end of the first year of students’ MSW coursework, when end-of-semester stressors such as final papers, projects, exams, and end-of-year fatigue may have hindered participation in the final phase of the study.
A third limitation of this study involved the potential burden of numerous steps required of students who were attempting to access the study assessments. To access the study, participants were provided a link to a SurveyMonkey survey. Upon entering the SurveyMonkey instrument, participants were informed of the study and requested to consent to the study prior to completing any assessments. Upon consenting to participate in the study, participants were provided instructions on how to access the MSCEIT assessment. The MSCEIT instrument is offered through the Multi Health Systems Incorporated website, which required participants to leave the SurveyMonkey survey and open the MSCEIT assessment through the MHS website. Upon entering the MHS website, participants were required to enter a pre-assigned code to access the assessment. In the initial phase of the study, 101 students completed the SurveyMonkey survey, but only 67 participants continued on to complete the phase one MSCEIT. Similar to the first phase of the study, the second phase of the study also required students to enter a SurveyMonkey survey and then switch to the MHS website. The 67 participants who completed phase one of the study were invited to participate in phase two of the study. Of those, 58 completed the SurveyMonkey survey, which included the Graduate Thriving Quotient in the second phase; however, only 51 students went on to complete the MSCEIT assessment on the MHS website. Thus, in addition to attempting to obtain volunteers’ responses at two demanding times of the academic year (the beginning and end of their first year of coursework), the extra steps needed to complete the assessments likely deterred broader participation in the study.

Finally, a critical limitation relates to the lack of variability in students’ graduate cumulative GPAs and field practice competency scores. Graduate GPAs (GGPA) were
calculated utilizing a 4.0 scale. The mean GGPA for graduate students in this study was 3.73, indicating the majority of students in this study earned high grades (e.g., A-’s and A’ s) in their first year courses. Because there was not substantial difference among grades, utilizing this measure as a dependent variable may have made prediction more difficult.

Implications for Practice

This study explored the extent to which students’ levels of emotional intelligence (EI) could predict student success for individuals enrolled in an MSW program. In particular, interest in conducting this study emerged from a desire to determine whether knowledge of an MSW applicant’s EI score during admissions deliberations could be a valuable factor when assessing that individual’s suitability for and ability to succeed in an MSW program. However, this study established that students’ level of emotional intelligence did not contribute significantly to the variation in the student success outcomes of cumulative graduate GPA, field practice competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient mean scores after controlling for the pre-program attributes of age, cumulative undergraduate GPA, and undergraduate major.

Even though emotional intelligence was not a significant predictor of student success, this study did find some unique relationships were found between pre- and post-emotional intelligence scores and factors associated with academic and interpersonal thriving. Understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and the Graduate Thriving Quotient factors (i.e., Engaged Learning, Academic Determination, and Social Connectedness) that lead to academic and interpersonal thriving could help social work educators better assess student potential during admissions by looking for
specific behaviors and characteristics revealed within the admissions application materials.

Although assessing potential students’ level of emotional intelligence may not be practical due to associated costs of administering the assessment, considering students’ prior academic behavior may explain their investment of energy, ability to meaningfully process new information, and connect new knowledge to real world applications, revealing their ability to engage in learning, persist, and academically thrive. Rather than relying solely upon undergraduate GPA as evidence of prior academic behavior, assessing students’ prior engagement in learning can be accomplished through the thoughtful questioning and prompts requested within the personal statements and faculty ratings frequently required in graduate social work admissions applications. For example, the admissions questioning and prompts could request that students discuss how they adapted to change in a new learning environment and how they managed their emotions during a difficult academic or personal challenge. Gleaning this information from both the applicants and references could help admissions committees identify students who are more likely to thrive in an MSW program and help student services professionals identify students who may need extra support in adapting to the rigors and demands of graduate school to thrive.

To support the interpersonal and academic thriving of current social work students, it would benefit MSW programs to increase efforts to build supportive learning environments that enhance Social Connectedness, Engaged Learning, and Academic Determination. To enhance Social Connectedness and foster healthy and supportive relationships among students, faculty, and field educators, schools of social work should
consider creating co-curricular opportunities such as school-wide service learning projects, collaborative research, and community networking opportunities to promote interpersonal thriving. These types of opportunities allow students to work together with faculty, community members, and other students toward a common goal, providing an opportunity for students to recognize how their contributions can enhance the common goal, assisting in the development of students’ sense of belonging and connection to the school, the community, and their chosen profession.

Another co-curricular opportunity for schools of social work to consider that can influence students’ levels of Social Connectedness is to establish student-led support groups that promote opportunities for students to connect with which each other both on and off campus. Such groups can provide students with peer support during times of academic challenge. As indicated in the research of Moriarty et al. (2009), peer support within social work graduate programs assumes greater importance in student success when external support (e.g., family and non-school friends) is not present. Further, Schreiner et al. (2013) noted that students who establish healthy and supportive relationships are more likely to feel a sense of belonging to a community larger than oneself, leading to greater interpersonal thriving. By focusing efforts to enhance Social Connectedness, schools of social work can foster students’ abilities to interpersonally thrive.

To enhance Engaged Learning, and Academic Determination, social work programs should continue to provide creative opportunities for students to meaningfully connect social work curriculum to the practical training students receive within their field practice experiences. For example, school personnel can identify common research
opportunities within the community where both faculty and field educators lead students through the evaluative process of assessing the effectiveness of an intervention or program and then further the opportunity by allowing students to implement their findings into practice. The collaborative approach between faculty and field education will allow students opportunities to receive frequent and constructive feedback which promotes increased levels of self-efficacy (Schreiner, Hulme, Hetzel, & Lopez, 2009), leading to higher levels of academic determination. Providing opportunities to increase engaged learning and academic determination among students will enable MSW students to better adapt and manage the challenges associated with learning and mastering social work competencies, ultimately resulting in students who thrive academically.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Given the findings of this study were counterintuitive to what might be expected of emerging practitioners in MSW programs (i.e., one would expect EI scores to be predictive of student success in an MSW program), future research should begin where this study ends. Although the findings of this study identified a decline in ability-based emotional intelligence scores after 1 year in the program, the relationship might actually be curvilinear. EI scores might increase again as students regain their sense of competence by successfully completing the full MSW curriculum and field work requirements. It could therefore be important for future researchers to explore the impact of an MSW program curriculum on students’ emotional intelligence over the full course of the curriculum.

Further, longitudinal research would be a helpful contribution to the field. Specifically, future research could examine the effect of social work education and
professional social work practice on emotional intelligence 1 year after graduation and 5 years after graduation. Determining the longer term influence of MSW programs on emotional intelligence may help guide MSW curriculum and programs designed to enhance MSW student success.

Second, as noted, this study involved a relatively small number of participants (i.e., 51), all of whom were students in the same MSW program of a research university in the Northeast. Additional research is therefore needed with a larger population, preferably involving students from multiple institutions, to more fully understand the role of EI scores in relation to student success in MSW programs to better equip admissions professionals to identify competencies in applicants that contribute to the success of applicants in their programs.

To help garner a robust participant sample, it is recommended that researchers administer the MSCEIT assessment utilizing the paper-and-pencil data collection method, rather than the web-based administration, to reduce participant disengagement with the study. As was witnessed in the present study, having to access two web platforms and complete multiple steps to complete the study assessments may have deterred MSW students from participating in the study. Had this study provided all of the incoming first-year students the assessments utilizing paper-and-pencil data collection, although being more time intensive for the researcher, a larger and more representative sample of the student population would likely have been obtained, allowing better analysis of factors that predict student success in an MSW program.

Third, future research is needed to help educators in the field of social work (potentially also other helping professionals) to better understand which performance
criteria can best be used to predict success within a Master of Social Work program. GPA has long been accepted as a quantifiable performance measure (Plant et al., 2005; Robbins et al., 2004); however, researchers have previously acknowledged that subjectivity and grade inflation are problematic within U.S. colleges and institutions (Lu et al., 2011; Noble & Stretch, 2002; Scanlan & Care, 2004; Shoemaker & DeVos, 1999). Further, finding valid and reliable measures to accurately assess field practice competencies continues to be a challenge in social work education (Lu et al., 2011). Subjectivity in grading can be more prominent when there are multiple sections of courses with different instructors and diverse arrays of field practica sites, which may offer varied educational supervisory opportunities due to the varying levels of experience of the field educators. Additional research is needed to explore ways to control for subjectivity of grading for academic courses and field work.

Consistent with the aim of this study, it could benefit social work education to further explore encompassing a more holistic approach to defining student success rather than limit evidence of success to just the quantifiable measure of grades and graduation. To further understand the benefits of utilizing a holistic approach to define graduate student success, it is recommended that longitudinal research utilizing the Graduate Thriving Quotient be conducted to further identify variables that contribute to graduate student thriving in MSW programs and graduate programs in general.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated the extent to which emotional intelligence, as assessed by the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence test, could predict student success within a Master of Social Work program. Student success in this study was
operationalized by students attaining a high graduate GPA, field competency scores, and Graduate Thriving Quotient total mean scores. This study evidenced that neither pre- nor post-emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of student success in an MSW program. Additionally, results indicated that students’ emotional intelligence levels actually declined over the first year of study in an MSW program. Despite this decline and the fact that emotional intelligence, as measured by MSCEIT, was not a good predictor of success in MSW programs, this study did identify positive connections between emotional intelligence and factors associated with academic and interpersonal thriving. Specifically, pre-program emotional intelligence was significantly predictive of students’ levels of Engaged Learning and Social Connectedness after a year in the program, while emotional intelligence scores at the end of the first year were significantly related to MSW students’ levels of Academic Determination and Social Connectedness. Levels of Social Connectedness at the end of the first year also were significantly related to field practice competency scores.

These secondary findings are important to social work, given that they highlight how students’ ability to manage emotions can influence their ability to academically and interpersonally thrive within a Master of Social Work program. Thriving in an MSW program is reflective of students who are deeply engaged in the learning process (i.e., academically determined) as they strive to become professional social workers and continually enhance their abilities to forge meaningful and supportive relationships—a fundamental objective of social work education and practice.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1177/0098628312456626


Paper presented at the Third Positive Psychology Summit, Washington, DC.


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APPENDIX A

CSWE EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.1 CORE COMPETENCIES
## CSWE Educational Policy 2.1 Core Competencies

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<th>COMPETENCY</th>
<th>PRACTICE BEHAVIORS</th>
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| **EP 2.1.1 Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.** | ● Advocate for client access to the services of social work;  
● Practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development;  
● Attend to professional roles and boundaries;  
● Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication;  
● Engage in career-long learning; and  
● Use supervision and consultation. |
| **EP 2.1.2 Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.** | ● Recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice;  
● Make ethical decisions by applying standards of the NASW Code of Ethics and, as applicable, of the International Federation of Social Workers/International Association of Schools of Social Work Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles;  
● Tolerate ambiguity in resolving ethical conflicts; and  
● Apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions. |
| **EP 2.1.3 Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.** | ● Distinguish, appraise, and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge, and practice wisdom;  
● Analyze models of assessment, prevention, intervention, and evaluation; and  
● Demonstrate effective oral and written communication in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and colleagues. |
| **EP 2.1.4 Engage diversity and difference in practice.** | ● Recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power;  
● Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups;  
● Recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences; and  
● View themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work as informants. |
| **EP 2.1.5 Advance human rights and social and economic justice.** | ● Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination;  
● Advocate for human rights and social and economic justice; and |

Social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission, and its core values. They know the profession’s history. Social workers commit themselves to the profession’s enhancement and

Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision making. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of the profession, its ethical standards, and relevant law.

Social workers are knowledgeable about the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and reasoned discernment. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity. Critical thinking also requires synthesis and communication of relevant information.

Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim.
safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers recognize the global interconnections of oppression and are knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights. Social work incorporates social justice practices in organizations, institutions, and society to ensure that these basic human rights are distributed equitably and without prejudice.

EP 2.1.6 Engage in research-informed practice and research-informed practice.
Social workers use practice experience to inform research, employ evidence-based interventions, evaluate their own practice, and use research findings to improve practice, policy, and social service delivery. Social workers comprehend quantitative and qualitative research and understand scientific and ethical approaches to building knowledge.

EP 2.1.7 Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
Social workers are knowledgeable about human behavior across the life course; the range of social systems in which people live; and the ways social systems promote or deter people in maintaining or achieving health and well-being. Social workers apply theories and knowledge from the liberal arts to understand biological, social, cultural, psychological, and spiritual development.

EP 2.1.8 Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal context at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic, and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively.

EP 2.1.9 Respond to contexts that shape practice.
Social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal context at all levels of practice. Social workers recognize that the context of practice is dynamic, and use knowledge and skill to respond proactively.

EP 2.1.10(a)-(d) Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluation with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.
Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive process of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels.

2.1.10(a) Engagement

- Substantively and affectively prepare for action with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- Use empathy and other interpersonal skills; and
Social workers have the knowledge and skills
to practice with individuals, families, groups,
organizations, and communities. Practice
knowledge includes identifying, analyzing,
advocating, and providing leadership for
policies and services; and promoting social and
economic justice.

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<td>Develop a mutually agreed-on focus of work and desired outcomes.</td>
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### 2.1.10(b) Assessment
- Collect, organize, and interpret client data;
- Assess client strengths and limitations;
- Develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives; and
- Select appropriate intervention strategies.

### 2.1.10(c) Intervention
- Initiate actions to achieve organizational goals;
- Implement prevention interventions that enhance client capacities;
- Help clients resolve problems;
- Negotiate, mediate, and advocate for clients; and
- Facilitate transitions and endings.

### 2.1.10(d) Evaluation
- Critically analyze, monitor and evaluate interventions.

(CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2008, pp. 3-7)
APPENDIX B

CSWE SOCIAL WORK COMPETENCIES
### Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Social workers understand frameworks of ethical decision-making and how to apply principles of critical thinking to those frameworks in practice, research, and policy arenas. Social workers recognize personal values and the distinction between personal and professional values. They also understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social workers understand the profession’s history, its mission, and the roles and responsibilities of the profession. Social Workers also understand the role of other professions when engaged in inter-professional teams. Social workers recognize the importance of life-long learning and are committed to continually updating their skills to ensure they are relevant and effective. Social workers also understand emerging forms of technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice.

- make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context;
- use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations;
- demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;
- use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and
- use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

### Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power.

- apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;
- present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and
- apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

### Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

- apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels; and
Social workers understand that every person regardless of position in society has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights. Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected.

**Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice**

Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice. Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. They also understand the processes for translating research findings into effective practice.

- use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research;
- apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings; and
- use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery

**Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice**

Social workers understand that human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, are mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. Social workers understand the history and current structures of social policies and services, the role of policy in service delivery, and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers understand their role in policy development and implementation within their practice settings at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels and they actively engage in policy practice to effect change within those settings. Social workers recognize and understand the historical, social, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy. They are also knowledgeable about policy formulation, analysis, implementation, and evaluation

- Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services;
- assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services;
- apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.

**Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities**

Social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of,

- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies; and
- use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.
Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities Cont.

...diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers value the importance of human relationships. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to facilitate engagement with clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand strategies to engage diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may impact their ability to effectively engage with diverse clients and constituencies. Social workers value principles of relationship-building and inter-professional collaboration to facilitate engagement with clients, constituencies, and other professionals as appropriate.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that assessment is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in the assessment of diverse clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand methods of assessment with diverse clients and constituencies to advance practice effectiveness. Social workers recognize the implications of the larger practice context in the assessment process and value the importance of inter-professional collaboration in this process. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may affect their assessment and decision-making.

• collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies;
• apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies;
• develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies; and
• select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that intervention is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are knowledgeable about evidence-informed interventions to achieve the goals of clients and constituencies, including individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge to effectively intervene with clients and constituencies. Social workers understand methods of identifying...

• critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies;
• apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies;
• use inter-professional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes;
• negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies; and
Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities Cont.

analyzing and implementing evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals. Social workers value the importance of interprofessional teamwork and communication in interventions, recognizing that beneficial outcomes may require interdisciplinary, interprofessional, and inter-organizational collaboration.

- facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social workers understand that evaluation is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with, and on behalf of, diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Social workers recognize the importance of evaluating processes and outcomes to advance practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness. Social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, and critically evaluate and apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes. Social workers understand qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness.

- select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes;
- apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes;
- critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes; and
- apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

(2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master’s Social Work Programs, pp. 7-9)