



**Parallel Process in Final Field Education: A Continuing Education Workshop to Promote Best Practices in Social Work**

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# **A Survey of Continuing Education Programs Conducted by *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education***

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Noel Landuyt & Nawal Murjana Traish

## **Abstract**

The needs of individuals and the most effective ways that can be used to help them are constantly evolving. Therefore, social workers involved in helping efforts must continually be engaged in learning and education to stay informed. In order to accomplish this, continuing education (CE) is an integral part of the social work profession. As a result of the importance of continuing social work education for professional practice, states and provinces, through governmental authority, have made obtaining CE hours a requirement for maintaining professional competency and skills. However, CE requirements and administration are operated on a location-by-location basis. As a result of this reality, there are different jurisdictions and little connection or coordination in CE program information. A first step in increasing this coordination and communication is to gather information from the various CE programs. The collection and dissemination of programmatic information would act as a benchmark and a resource for CE program directors, program administrators, and the broader social services community. Also such data would operate as an impetus in shaping future collaboration between programs, which has the potential to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of CE programs.

## **Introduction**

Social work is a field that continually evolves as researchers and practitioners refine practices and explore the use of new interventions in order to best meet their clients' needs. Due to regular developments in the profession, social workers need a way to remain informed about best practices. In fact, the National Association of

Social Workers' Code of Ethics requires social workers to remain professionally competent by "routinely review[ing] the professional literature and participat[ing] in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics" (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). Continuing education (CE) programs provide a means by which social work practitioners can comply with this ethical principle. CE is an ongoing part of social workers' education that allows them to provide quality services to their clients (Congress, 2012).

To help social workers develop and maintain professional competency skills, many states, through governmental authority, have made completing CE hours a requirement for license renewal. The specifics and administration of these CE hour requirements are operated on a location-by-location basis, causing great variation in CE programs across the nation. Consequently, there is often very little connection or coordination in CE program information. This is a detriment to CE program staff, as more communication would allow them to learn from one another and replicate the successes and avoid the pitfalls of other programs. In order to address this need, *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* developed a survey to gather information from various CE programs. The data from this study can serve as a benchmark and resource for CE program staff and the broader social work community.

## **Methods**

*Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* developed and administered a cross-sectional

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survey of CE programs completed in 2016. The mission of this journal is to provide:

...Scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the Journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field (*Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, n.d.).

The survey's sample was drawn from members of the Continuing Education Network (CENet), a Council on Social Work Education committee. This committee is composed of members from ninety CE programs within the United States and Canada. CENet members were chosen for this survey due to their professional experience with their own CE programs and their expertise and knowledge of social work CE. Lead administrators of the CE programs and/or those individuals listed as the program contacts were sent email invitations to take the survey in the fall of 2013. Those who had participated in the 2009 iteration of the CE survey received a copy of their previous survey answers for updating. All other participants were given a blank survey to fill out and return via email, fax, or mail.

Discussions between key members of the CENet and the principal investigators led to the development and design of survey questions. The survey consisted of 31 questions, some of which were multifaceted and asked for multiple answers. Items were both closed and open-ended, with answer choices ranging from "yes/no" to "choose all that apply." Topics addressed by the survey include state CE hour requirements, CE program and staff information, resources available, and course topics. Data from completed surveys were entered in an Excel worksheet, and descriptive statistics were calculated in order to better understand the survey responses given.

## Results

Email invitations were sent to 77 CENet members from the fall of 2015 through the spring of 2016. Of those invited to participate, 36 individuals returned completed surveys, resulting in a response rate of 47% percent. Survey respondents indicated that they fulfilled a large variety of roles within their CE programs, with some respondents performing multiple roles. Consequently, the frequencies reported in Figure 1 and below for the professional role(s) of respondents are not mutually exclusive and sum to more than the 36 total individual responses. The largest group represented, at over 41% of the sample, was CE program directors (n=24). The next largest groups were faculty members (n=11) at 19% of the sample, and directors of other programs (n=7) at over 12% of the sample. Six respondents indicated that they were assistant or associate deans, seven were "other" staff members with different responsibilities (e.g., office administration duties), and one was a staff member with community relations/development responsibilities. Two respondents identified as career services staff members.

In addition to identifying their professional role(s), CENet members were also asked to report the number of years they had worked in their current position. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the majority of respondents had either worked three to five years (n=10) or six to ten years (n=10). Seven respondents acknowledged being relatively new to their positions, with zero to two years of experience in that role. Eight respondents had spent 11 to 20 years in their current position, and one individual had 21 or more years of experience in their current role.

## Continuing Education Requirements

One of the first survey items inquired about the CE requirements for social workers in the respondent's state at the bachelors, masters, and clinical and/or advanced practice levels. Since the item did not specify the time parameters within which the hour requirements were to be met, some of the respondents' total number of required CE hours reported may encompass more than one year.

## A Survey of Continuing Education Programs

Figure 1: Professional Role(s) of Respondent

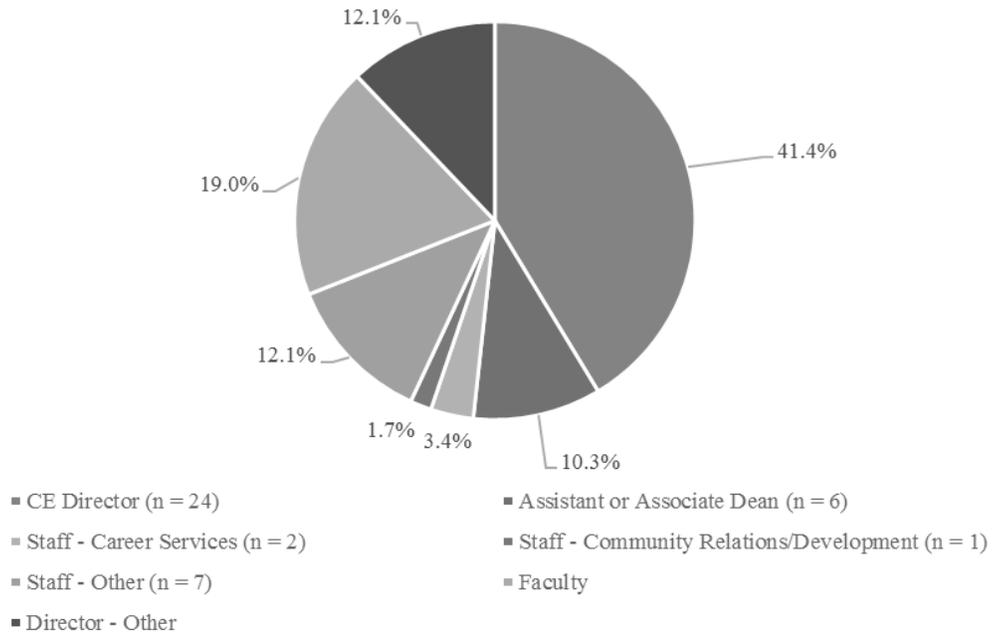
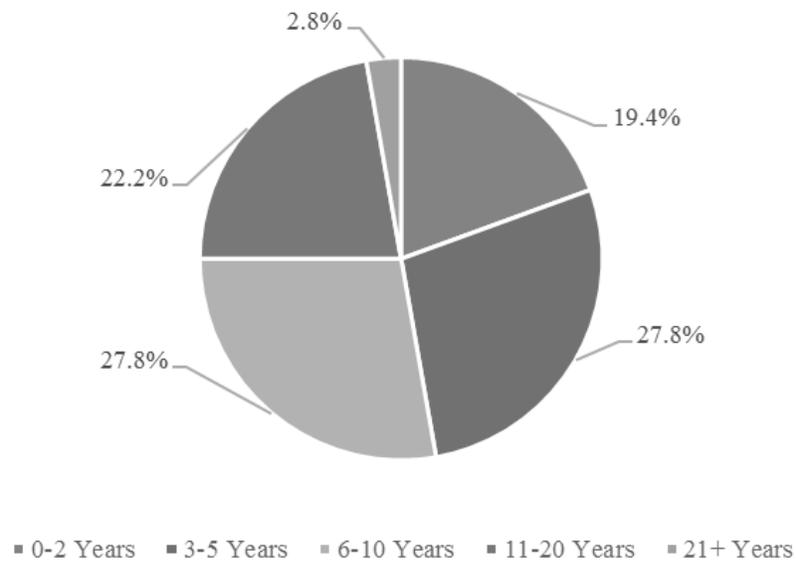


Figure 2: Number of Years in Current Position



**Table 1. BSW Continuing Education Hours**  
n = 26

Number of CE Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	2	7.7%
15	1	3.8%
20	3	11.5%
27	1	3.8%
30	12	46.2%
40	4	15.4%
45	2	7.7%
57	1	3.8%

**Table 2. Ethics Hours Required for BSW**  
n = 21

Number of Ethics Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	1	0.0%
2	1	4.8%
3	10	47.6%
5	4	19.0%
6	4	19.0%
10	1	4.8%

**Table 3. MSW Continuing Education Hours**  
n = 31

Number of CE Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	2	6.5%
20	2	6.5%
27	1	3.2%
30	16	51.6%
36	2	6.5%
40	4	12.9%
45	3	9.7%
57	1	3.2%

**Bachelors of Social Work (BSW).** Table 1 presents data from the 26 programs that provided information regarding the BSW-level CE hour requirements. The average and the modal response (n=10) were both 30 required hours. Two respondents indicated that there were no CE hours required for BSW practitioners, and one program reported the sample's maximum number of required hours at 57.

**Ethics (BSW).** The same survey item also asked respondents to indicate the number of ethics CE hours required for BSW-level practitioners. Twenty-one respondents answered this item, leading to an average of four required ethics CE hours. The modal response was three hours. One respondent reported that their state does not require ethics CE hours for BSWs, and one reported the sample's maximum number of required hours at 10 (see Table 2).

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**Table 4. Ethics Hours Required for MSW**

**n = 25**

Number of Ethics Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	1	4.0%
2	1	4.0%
3	12	48.0%
5	4	16.0%
6	6	24.0%
10	1	4.0%

**Table 5. Clinical and/or Advanced Practice CE Hours**

**n = 28**

Number of CE Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	2	7.1%
20	1	3.6%
27	1	3.6%
30	15	53.6%
36	1	3.6%
40	5	17.9%
45	2	7.1%
70	1	3.6%

**Table 6. Clinical and/or Advanced Practice Ethics Hours**

**n = 24**

Number of Ethics Hours	Frequency	Percentage
0	1	4.2%
2	1	4.2%
3	12	50.0%
5	4	16.7%
6	5	20.8%
10	1	4.2%

**Additional Requirements (Clinical and/or Advanced Practice).** In addition to providing information regarding CE and ethics hours required for clinical and/or advanced practice social workers, respondents were also asked to indicate if their states have any additional CE requirements for this educational level. Three respondents reported an additional three hours of social and cultural competence were required at this level. One hour of pain management was

required by two respondents' states. Two participants indicated that three hours of supervision were additionally required. Other requirements included two hours of boundaries (n=1), ten hours of clinical content such as diagnosis and treatment (n=1), and six hours of diagnosis and treatment (n=1). One respondent reported the additional requirements of two medical errors hours each cycle and three hours of a domestic violence course once. Lastly, one

**Table 7. Number of Staff Employed by the CE Program**

Staff Description	Mode	Mean	Max	Min	Responses
FT Professional Paid Staff	1	1	9	0	34
PT Professional Paid Staff	1	1	2	0	31
FT Contract/Temporary Staff	0	<1	4	0	24
PT Contract/Temporary Staff	0	<1	2	0	25
FT TA/Student Support	0	<1	1	0	25
PT TA/Student Support	0	1	4	0	29

respondent noted that their state requires one course on HIV every ten years, and a one-time domestic violence class.

**Online Hours.** The survey also asked respondents if part or all of a social worker’s required CE hours could be completed online. Of the 29 individuals who responded to this question, all but one indicated that their respective states did allow practitioners to complete all or part of their CE requirements online. The average number of hours allowed to be completed online was 23, while the modal response (n=8) was 30 hours.

**CE Program Resources and Costs.**

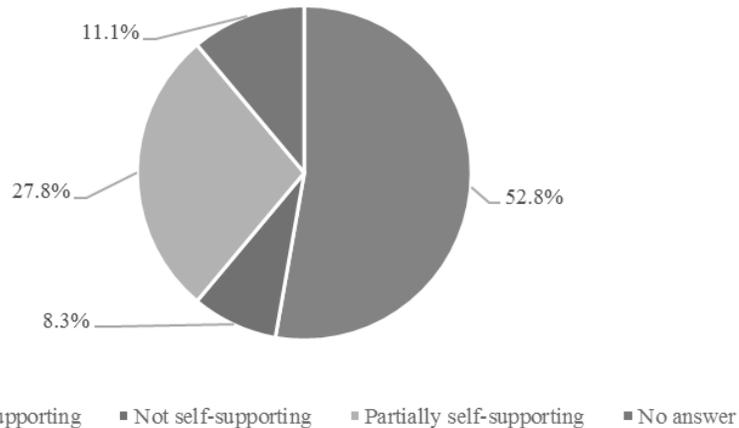
**CE Staff.** In addition to asking about the continuing education hour requirements in various states, the survey also included items to assess the CE programs’ abilities to manage and administer classes and workshops. The first component of program capacity was the amount of staff support available (see Table 7). Respondents reported the number of full-time and part-time paid professional staff, contract/temporary staff, and teaching assistants/student support. Thirty-four respondents provided information regarding the total number of full-time paid professional staff. About half of them (n=16) indicated that their program had only one full-time paid professional staff member. The average number of full-time paid professional staff members was about 1.5. The highest number of employees reported for this category was nine, while six programs reported having no full-time paid professional staff members. The modal response (20 individuals of the total 31 respondents) for the

number of part-time paid professional staff was one, with an average of 0.84. The maximum number of employees reported for this category was two (n=2), while the minimum was zero (n=6). The average number of part-time TA/student support staff members was 0.93, with a modal response (n=12) of zero. The maximum number of individuals for this category was four. The modal responses for the rest of the staff categories were all zero, with averages for each of them of less than one. The highest number of employees reported for each of the remaining categories was four for full-time contract/temporary staff, two for part-time contract/temporary staff, and one for full-time TA/student support.

**Program Support.** Next, survey respondents were asked to indicate if their program was self-supporting. This item’s purpose was to discover if resources used to operate the CE programs were generated by the programs themselves, external sources, or some combination of the two. Figure 3 presents the results from the 36 individuals who responded to this survey item. Over half of the respondents (n=19, 52.8%) reported that their programs were self-supporting. The next largest group, at 27.8%, indicated that their programs were partially self-supporting (n=10), ranging from 20% to 80% self-supporting. Finally, three programs (8.3%) reported that they were not self-supporting.

A separate set of questions inquired about the external sponsorship of CE programs. Ten out of 27 respondents (37.0%) indicated that their programs received external sponsorships. The average number of programs within a CE

Figure 3: Program Self-Supporting



department that had external support was 10. Another question asked if the CE program had an advisory board to help oversee and support its activities. Of the 24 individuals who responded to this question, 10 (42.0%) indicated that they had an advisory board, and 14 indicated that they did not.

Finally, respondents were also asked about their CE programs' budgets. Seventeen individuals provided this information, resulting in an average annual budget of \$348,503. A follow-up question asked if the program's annual budget had changed in the last year. Twenty-two individuals responded to this question. Eight individuals (36.4%) indicated that their budget had not changed. Eleven individuals (50.0%) reported that their annual budgets had decreased in the past year. The remaining three respondents (13.6%) indicated that their program budgets had increased in the past year.

**Cost of Program.** Another item associated with program finances is the cost to attend CE courses and the fees paid to CE course presenters (see Tables 8 and 9). The average cost of attending a half-day CE course was \$65 (n=30), while the modal response (n=6) was \$75. The price of attending a half-day CE course ranged from a low of \$25 to a high of \$90. The cost of attending a full-day CE course ranged from a low of \$25 to a high of \$168. The average amount

paid by attendees for full-day courses was \$122 (n=31), while the modal response was \$100 (n=3).

Presenters for half-day CE courses were paid an average of \$382 (n=28), with a modal fee (n=11) of \$300. The maximum amount paid to half-day presenters was \$800, while the minimum was \$100. For full-day CE courses, presenters were paid an average of \$788 (n=29). However, some full-day presenters were paid as much as \$3,500 or as little as \$100. The modal cost (n=9) was \$600. These presenter fees do not include travel allowances.

**Number of Workshops.**

Respondents were also asked to provide information regarding the number of workshops offered and the total number of attendees each year at these workshops. This data was separated depending on whether it was a full-day or half-day workshop (see Table 10). The highest number of half-day workshops was 125, while the lowest number was one. The average number of half-day workshops was 29 (n=23). The average number of full-day workshops provided by CE programs was 67 (n=29). The most full-day workshops reported by a CE program was 350, and the minimum was one. Respondents also provided data for the number of attendees at these workshops each year. The average number of

**Table 8. Costs Associated with Attending Half and Full Day CE**

Category	Mean Cost	Mode Cost	Max Cost	Min Cost	Responses
Half day: Amount participants pay	\$65	\$75	\$90	\$25	30
Full day: Amount participants pay	\$122	\$100	\$168	\$25	31

**Table 9. Fees Paid to Presenters at Half and Full Day CE Courses**

\*Fees do not include travel allowances

Category	Mean Cost	Mode Cost	Max Cost	Min Cost	Responses
Half Day: Amount paid to presenters	\$382	\$300	\$800	\$100	28
Full Day: Amount paid to Presenters	\$788	\$600	\$3500	\$100	29

**Table 10. Number of Workshops and Attendees Each Year**

exam preparation materi-

Questions	Mean	Max	Min	Responses
How many half day workshops do you offer per year?	29	125	1	23
How many full day workshops do you offer per year?	67	350	1	29
How many half day attendees do you have per year?	584	3400	15	24
How many full day attendees do you have per year?	1,548	9,000	15	22

attendees at half-day workshops was 584 (n=24), the maximum was 3,400, and the minimum was 15. The highest annual total for full-day CE course attendees was 9,000 and the least was 15. The average number of annual attendees to full-day CE courses was 1,548 (n=19).

**Technology**

Another important component of CE program success that was assessed by this survey was availability of technological resources. Respondents were given a list of technological tools and were asked to check all of the resources they had available to them (see Figure 4). The most widely-used technological resource was websites (n=32), followed by the ability to post course options online (n=27). Sixteen respondents indicated that they offered online courses, and 16 reported that they utilized course management and/or registration management software. Less common were having marketing resources, such as

als or books, available online (n=8), offering courses that use a mix of classroom and online approaches (n=6), offering distance or offering webinars (n=4). Additional technological resources not included on the survey but mentioned by respondents in the comments section of this item were community outreach, a university's online registration system, a customer relations management system, and an online payment feature.

**Marketing**

The survey also explored the marketing and advertising strategies utilized by the CE programs (see Figure 5). Respondents were given a list of marketing and advertising approaches and were asked to check all they had used in their program. The most common marketing approach used was to post on an internet website (n=34), followed by using an email distribution list (n=26). Other noteworthy strategies included direct marketing emails (n=22), targeted mailings (n=16), formal

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Figure 4: Technological Resources Available to Programs

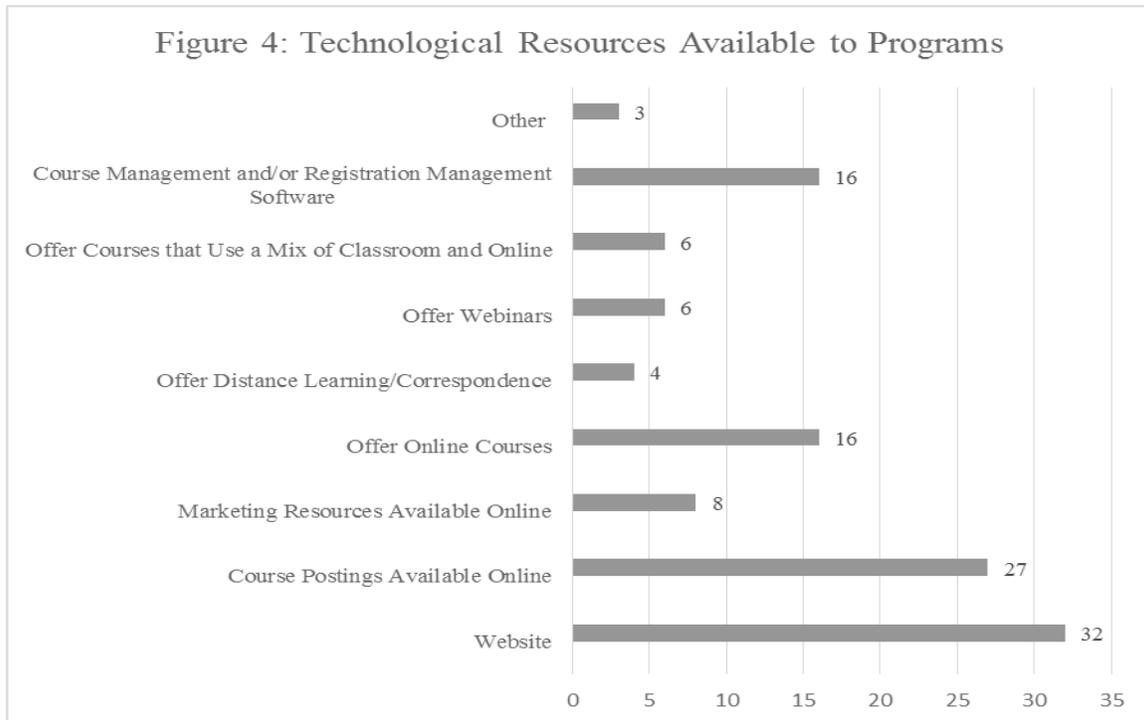
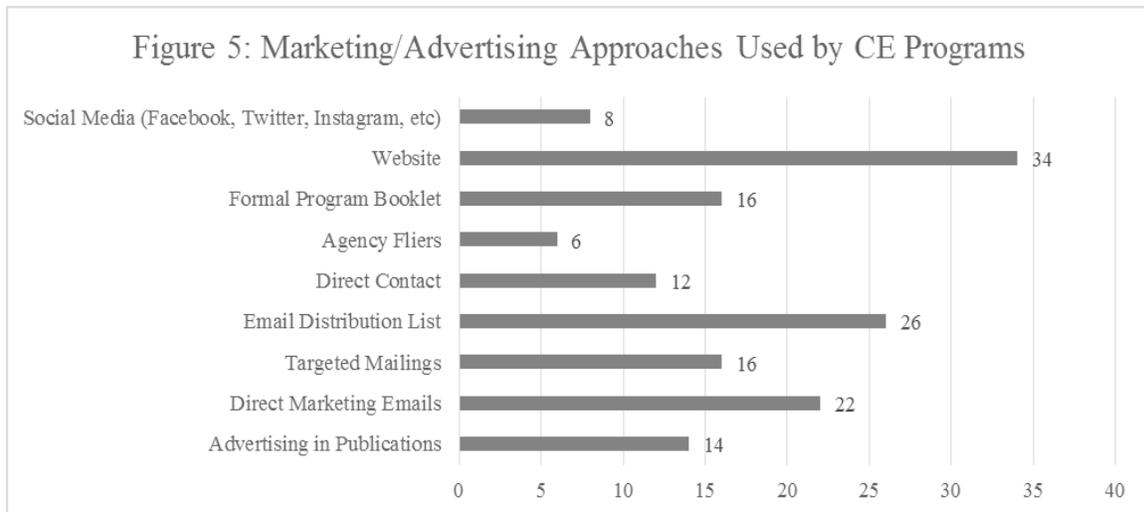


Figure 5: Marketing/Advertising Approaches Used by CE Programs



program booklets (n=16), advertising in publications (n=14), and direct contact (n=12). Less commonly used were social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and blogs (n=8), and agency fliers (n=6). Other approaches mentioned were digital monitors and having CE program schedule brochures direct readers to the CE program's website.

Respondents were also asked to indicate which marketing approach they felt was most effective at drawing in participants. A wide variety of marketing tactics were cited as most effective. Common responses included email distribution lists, targeted mailings, course catalogs, and website postings.

**Table 11. Hot Topics**

Topic	Frequency
Ethics	12
Trauma-informed care and other related topics	10
Clinical supervision	8
Changes in the DSM-5 and relation to social work	6
Licensing review course	5
Elderly/geriatric care	5
Substance abuse, addiction	5
Spirituality	4
Clinical practice/techniques	3
Domestic violence, child abuse	3
Working with veterans	2
Dialectical Behavior Therapy	2
Attachment (in adolescents or others)	2
HIV/AIDS	2
Women Who Lead: 3 day Institute	1
Latino conference	1
Motivational interviewing	1
Art therapy	1
Safety Training	1
Human sexuality	1
Neuroscience and social work practice	1
Adoption, child and adolescent mental health	1
Sessions from the CSW 2-15 annual program meeting	1
Human trafficking	1
Creative writing	1
Behavioral health service coordination and mentoring	1
Pain management	1
Spanish for social workers	1
Executive training	1
Field education	1
Infidelity	1
Diagnosis and treatment	1
Dementia disorders	1
Managing nonprofits	1
Burnout	1
Mental illness	1
Medical errors	1
Advocacy and lobbying	1
Intro to Managing Health Care online course	1
International global human rights/interdependence	1
Using social work skills in the corporate setting, conversations with adolescents	1
Program evaluation	1

### **Certificates and Other Professions**

Survey respondents were asked if their CE programs offer certificates. Twenty-seven of the 30 respondents for this question, or 90%, indicated that their programs do provide certificates. Some of the certificates mentioned by respondents include adoption case management, child/adolescent mental health, mediation, nonprofit management, trauma-informed programs, child welfare practice, co-occurring disorders in adolescents, clinical supervision, aging studies, clinical addiction drug counseling, behavioral health service coordination, advanced psychodynamic clinical practice, and more.

The survey also asked if CE programs provided CE hours to other disciplines/professions besides social work. Twenty-six of the 28 respondents for this question, or 93%, indicated that their programs did provide CE hours to individuals from other professions. Some of the other professions mentioned were teachers, licensed professional counselors, nurses, psychologists, licensed chemical dependence counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, and others.

### **Course Topics**

Another important part of the survey asked respondents about the course topics offered by their CE programs. Table 11 lists the “hot topics” mentioned by respondents. Each respondent was asked to provide three “hot topics” for their program and the reasons why these courses were popular. The most frequently mentioned hot topics were ethics (n=11), trauma-informed care and related topics (n=10), and the changes in the DSM-5 (n=6),

In addition to hot topics, the survey also inquired about new topics being provided by CE programs (see Table 12). Each respondent was asked to report three new courses and the reasons these topics were now being offered. The most frequently mentioned new topic was the DSM-5 (n=5). Three respondents indicated that their programs were now offering courses in techniques for supervision and leadership. Other common new topics included trauma and trauma-informed care (n=2), nonprofit leadership and management (n=2), culturally competent and ethical social work practice with LGBTQ

individuals (n=2), and integrated health and mental health (n=2). The remaining new topics were only mentioned one time each.

Respondents were additionally asked to provide information about the topics that were cancelled and the reasons behind their cancellations (see Table 13). Each respondent was allowed to report three courses that were cancelled. Eleven different cancelled CE courses were listed including arts in prevention, addiction, bullying, gambling counseling, functional family therapy, eating disorders, introduction to play therapy, motivational interviewing, topics related to self-care, dealing with finances in tough times, and single-session therapy.

Lastly, participants were asked if they would be willing to fill out a detailed information sheet on their hot topics. Of the 27 individuals who responded to this question, 11 (40.7%) indicated that they would not like to share information about their hot topics, nine (33.3%) said that they would be willing to share information, and seven (25.9%) indicated that they would like more information (see Table 14).

### **Limitations**

One limitation to the data analysis in this report should be noted. The exploratory nature of this survey led to the formatting of the survey instrument in a way that allowed respondents to write in answers to some questions, including those that asked for quantitative answers. Additionally, some respondents provided answers to quantitative questions in numerical ranges. For example, when asked the number of attendees at full-day CE courses, one respondent reported 300-600. In order to calculate and report statistics of central tendency (e.g. means, modes, etc.), the midpoint of response ranges were used. In the attendance example cited above, 450 was used as the number of full-day CE course attendees. In those few other cases where ranges were reported by participants, similar midpoint estimations were used for calculation purposes.

### **Discussion and Implications**

CE programs are an important part of the social work community. They allow social workers to best meet client needs and to comply

**Table 12. New Topics**

country are making a significant time commitment to CE in order

Topic	Frequency
DSM-5, various topics	5
Supervision/leadership	3
Trauma-informed care	2
Non-profit management and leadership course	2
Culturally competent and ethical social work practice with LGBTQ Individuals	2
Integrated health and mental health	2
Bullying and harassment in schools	1
Life coaching	1
Integrated treatments	1
Program evaluation certificate program	1
Food insecurity	1
Domestic violence	1
Aging intermediary care management	1
Managing the transition from clinician to program manager	1
Social work movie nights	1
Immigration in child welfare	1
CASAC training	1
Introduction to narrative therapy	1
Global human rights	1
Social work safety	1
Ethics	1
Spirituality and social work	1
Cognitive behavioral therapy Level I and Level II	1

with their ethical responsibilities to remain competent practitioners. Furthermore, many states require social workers to complete CE hours in order to renew their licenses. There does exist, however, a large amount of variation in these requirements from state to state. For example, though respondents reported CE hour requirements as high as 70, two individuals indicated that their states had zero CE hour requirements for social workers. It seems that some states place more of an emphasis on continuing education credits than others. However, averages gleaned from this survey do point to the importance of CE requirements for social workers in most areas surveyed. The average number of required CE hours was 30 for BSWs, 31 for MSWs, and 32 for clinical and/or advanced practitioners. Social workers across the

to continue to build and retain their professional skills.

#### **CE Staffing**

The demand for programs that provide these CE hours could not be met without the dedication of many professionals from this field. Of the CE program leaders surveyed for this project, nearly half (41.4%) identified themselves as the CE director. Many of these individuals also perform other roles in their programs. In fact, 45.7% of all survey respondents indicated that they fulfilled two or more roles in their CE programs. These individuals are required to assume a variety of responsibilities within their institution. This may be the result of the small size of many programs surveyed. The sample average was 1.5 full-time paid staff members, though some individuals

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**Table 12. New Topics (Continued)**

Topic	Frequency
Military social work	1
Cognitive processing therapy	1
Disaster planning for service-providing agencies	1
Forgiveness	1
Brain health for the 21st Century	1
Specific clinical techniques with children	1
CBT for anxiety and depression certificate program	1
Equine-assisted therapy	1
Medical errors	1
Cultural competence	1
Grant writing for social workers	1
Self-determination and person-centered planning	1
Special needs offenders	1
Adoption	1
Treating sexually abused children	1
Disability and social work	1
Introduction to animal-assisted interventions	1
Acceptance and commitment therapy	1
Vulnerable populations	1
Behavioral health and substance abuse treatment in Native American communities	1
Program and policy implications	1
Treatment issues with children and loss	1
Pain management	1
Complexities of eating disorders	1
Sex trafficking	1

indicated that they did not have any full-time paid staff members. The sample average for part time paid staff members was 0.84. Given the small staff size and the multiple roles performed by each staff member, it is fortunate that more than 80.6% of those surveyed indicated that they had three or more years of experience in their current positions.

More than half of those surveyed (52.8%) indicated that their CE programs were completely self-supporting—an impressive feat when considering the minimal number of staff members employed at the programs surveyed. Another large portion of respondents (27.8%) indicated that their programs were partially self-supporting, leaving only 8.3% of programs that were not self-supporting (11.1% of respondents provided no answer). Each of these programs also carried a high

workload, as seen in the number of CE courses offered each year. The average number of full-day courses offered by programs surveyed was 67, with an average of 1,548 attendees per year. The average number of half-day workshops was 29, with an average of 584 attendees per year. Clearly, program employees keep busy providing this crucial service for their communities on an ongoing basis.

### Presenter Cost

One key responsibility for CE program staff is finding and working with the individuals who teach or present on various topics. In order to attract qualified and engaging presenters, CE programs offer these individuals fees for their services. The average fee paid to full-day

**Table 13. Canceled Topics**

Topic	Reason for Cancellation
Using Arts in Prevention	Reason not given
Addiction	Low enrollment
Bullying	Low enrollment
Gambling Counseling	Reduced major focus, emphasis now on partnering for maintaining certification but significant number of gambling counselors now
In-class workshops on general topics	
Functional Family Therapy	Low attendance
Courses that have been offered for 2+ years	Customers need fresh, relevant information
Self-care	Agencies only paying for evidence-based direct practice type of programming. Anything non-traditional or not evidence-based is not acceptable at this point.
Eating disorders	No interest
Taming finances in tough times	No interest
Introduction to play therapy	Low enrollment
Motivational Interviewing	Topic may be on downswing
Documentation	Low enrollment
Single Session Therapy	No interest

**Table 14. Willingness to Share Information on Hot Topics**  
n = 27

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	33.3%
No	11	40.7%
Would like more information	7	25.9%

workshop presenters was \$788, though they were paid as high as \$3,500 or as low as \$100. Half-day workshop presenters received as much as \$800 and as little as \$100, with an average fee of \$382. These figures indicate that providing high-quality CE workshops led by experienced presenters could be a significant cost for CE programs.

#### Technology

In addition to locating quality presenters, CE program staff can also increase their effectiveness by continually re-evaluating and improving the

ways that they use technology to deliver services. Based on this survey, it appears that many CE programs have already begun the process of integrating technology into their services. Thirty-two out of 34 respondents indicated that their program makes use of an online website, and 27 indicated that they have their course postings available online. About half of the individuals surveyed also reported offering online courses. This survey also indicated that there is still plenty of room for advancement in this area.

For example, only six programs offer webinars, and only four have distance learning/

correspondence as an option. Other technological resources were courses that blend classroom and online learning (n=6), marketing resources available online (n=8), and course management and/or registration management software (n=16). In an increasingly technological world, busy social workers may expect and/or rely on resources such as webinars or distance learning to complete their CE hour requirements. Resources such as course management software may also ease some of the administrative burden put on the limited staff members at these CE programs.

### Marketing

Electronic and virtual means of advertising continue to be cited as popular marketing approaches used by CE programs. The most commonly reported marketing approaches were websites (n=34), email distribution lists (n=26), and direct marketing emails (n=22). Somewhat less popular were print-based advertising methods such as targeted mailings (n=16), formal program booklets (n=16), and advertising in publications (n=14). Interestingly, only six respondents reported using agency fliers to market their programs. Most survey respondents indicated that electronic and virtual means of marketing, such as websites and emails, were the most effective means of drawing in participants. Additionally, these technological resources may represent a more cost-effective approach to marketing.

### Hot Topics

Another important part of the survey asked participants to share their programs' hot topics. Topic selection is important not only for meeting specific state requirements for social work CE hours, but also for attracting workshop participants. The four most common hot topics listed by survey participants were ethics (n=12), trauma-informed care and other related topics (n=10), clinical supervision (n=8), and changes in the DSM-5 and its relation to social work (n=6). The ethics course is likely popular due to the specific ethics CE requirements in many states. The recent update to the DSM with the release of the DSM-5 explains its popularity. Many survey

respondents indicated that the new version of the DSM was causing confusion and anxiety for their customers, and that the class was being offered in response to this perceived need. Trauma-informed care is also an increasingly important topic for mental health practitioners wanting to provide the best care possible to their clients.

Another hot topic mentioned was licensing review courses (n=5). Clearly licensure requirements drive much of the content of CE courses, as social workers strive to maintain their license to practice. Another commonly mentioned topic was spirituality in social work (n=4), reflecting the growing importance this topic has had over the past two decades in social work research, education, and practice (Barker & Floersch, 2010). Other hot topics mentioned more than once related to specific populations and interventions, including domestic violence, working with veterans, dialectical behavior therapy, the elderly, and substance abuse and clinical drug addiction.

### New Topics

Respondents also provided information on the new topics they were offering. Many of the hot topics provided by respondents were also new topics. For example, the most frequently mentioned new topic (n=5) was the DSM-5, which was also one of the top hot topics. The fifth and newest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which was released in May of 2013, contained many structural and organizational changes from the previous version, including the elimination of the multiaxial system and changes to diagnostic criteria for certain disorders (Wakefield, 2013). CE providers responded to this major change in the mental health field by providing courses to help social workers understand the changes and incorporate them into their practices. Two other frequently mentioned new topics that also appeared on the hot topic list were techniques for supervision (n=3) and trauma-informed care (n=2).

Another frequently reported new topic was nonprofit leadership and management (n=2). The reason given for adding this new topic was the need for post-degree, nonprofit administrative training.

The other new topics that were mentioned more than once were culturally competent and ethical social work practice with LGBTQ individuals (n=2) and integrated health and mental health care (n=2). Survey respondents indicated that the first of these topics was introduced to address a previously unmet need. Competent and ethical work with LGBTQ individuals may represent a growing area of importance to practitioners as LGBTQ advocacy continues to gain prominence on a national level. The reason given for introducing the topic of integrated health and mental health care to CE programs was that this is a major direction of behavioral services under the Affordable Care Act.

#### **Discontinued Topics**

After providing information about hot and new topics for their CE programs, survey respondents were lastly asked to report which topics they were discontinuing. This information may be important for other CE providers who are considering adding new topics. They can review this list to do a preliminary assessment of whether a topic may have traction with social work audiences. Eleven different cancelled CE courses were listed, including arts in prevention, addiction, bullying, gambling counseling, functional family therapy, eating disorders, introduction to play therapy, motivational interviewing, documentation, anything to do with self-care, dealing with finances in tough times, and single-session therapy. CE providers may want to do further research into their own community's interest in these topics before offering them as part of their curriculum.

#### **Conclusion**

The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics requires social workers to maintain professional competence through continuing education. The importance of continuing education is further supported by the fact that almost all states have made completing a certain number of CE hours a requirement for licensure renewal. CE programs assist social workers in complying with ethical standards, maintaining their licenses, and providing the best service possible to clients. Although CE programs have proliferated across the country, there is often little or no communication or coordination among programs. This is problematic

as it denies CE programs the opportunity to learn from each other's successes and mistakes. In order to begin to address this lack of coordination, *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education* developed and distributed a CE survey to programs affiliated with CENet. The results of this survey indicate that CE programs provide a great number of services to their communities while operating with very modest resources. The survey results additionally gave insights into various aspects of CE program operation, such as technological resources, marketing approaches, number of courses offered, hot topics, and more. The results of this survey can be used to begin a communication process among programs that allows them to duplicate other programs' successes and avoid their missteps. This in turn will lead to better-trained social workers with an enhanced ability to meet client needs.

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