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School of Social Work

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Evaluating Student Learning of Methods of Interpersonal Social Work Practice with African-American Families

ABSTRACT

Given concerns about "racial disproportionality" in social service systems, it is essential to prepare social work graduates with the ability to provide services in a way that considers cultural and historical context of their clients.

This project focuses on student learning in a master's course in the University of Michigan's School of Social Work, SSW 713: Interpersonal Social Work Practice with African-American Families in Historical and Contemporary Context. In this course, students discuss African history and culture in historical and contemporary context, and they apply an Africentric model to interpersonal practice.

A key framework for the course was the Ntu model, which "is based on the core principles of ancient African and Afrocentric world view, nurtured through African American culture, and augmented by concepts and techniques of Western psychology" (Phillips, 1990).

The key research questions are:

(1) From the beginning to the end of the term, does the SSW 713 class develop a more Africentric wordview?

(2) By the end of the term, will SSW 713 students be able to effectively apply Africentric perspectives to a case study of an African-American family receiving social work services in the child welfare system?

AFRICENTRIC PRACTICE MODEL

Contributions of African Descended People in Historical and Contemporary Context

⬇

Four Principles of Ntu

⬇

Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles of Kwanzaa)

⬇

Five Phases of the Ntu Model of Psychotherapy
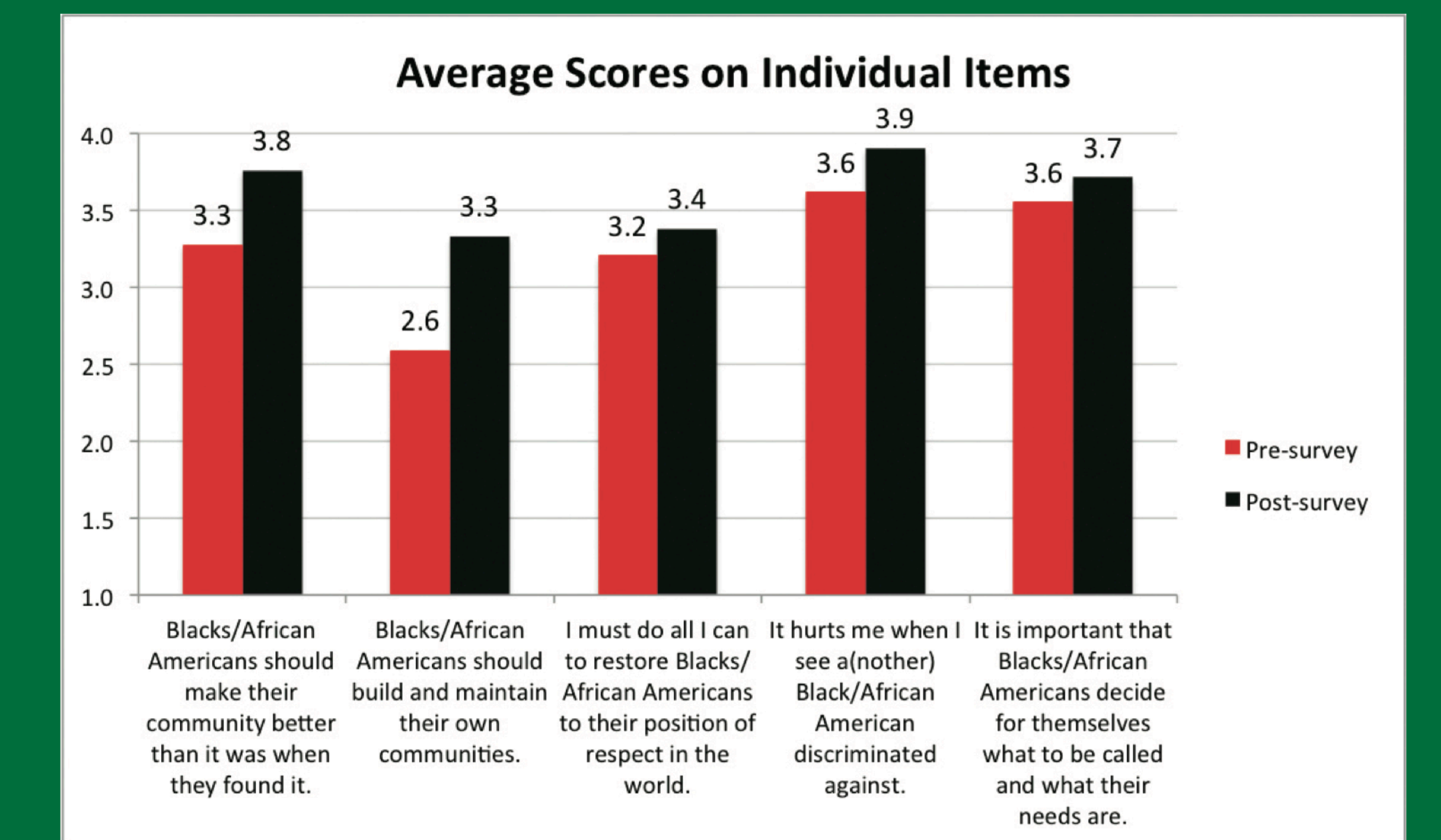
SURVEY DATA

In Fall 2012, 21 out of 22 students enrolled in SSW 713 completed pre- and post-surveys assessing Africentric values and worldviews.

The 14-item survey was adapted from one validated by Cokley & Williams (2005). Students rated items on a four-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

Average Composite Africentric Score

Pre-survey: 3.4
Post-survey: 3.5
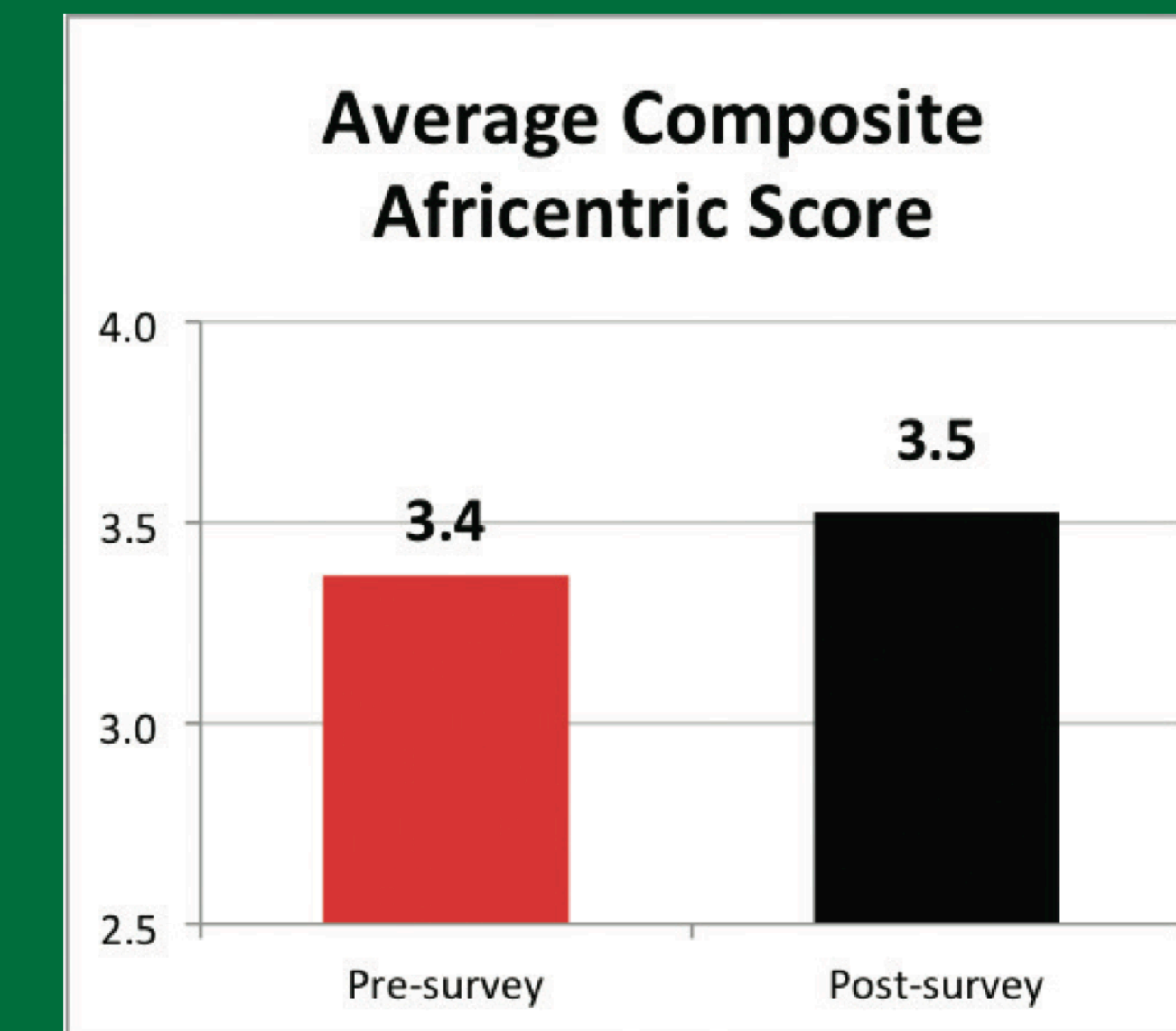
Overall, students' values, behavioral norms, and worldview as measured by the survey became more Africentric/African.

The five items on which students' responses changed the most are shown below:

Average Scores on Individual Items

Item	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Blacks/African Americans should make their community better than it was when they found it.	3.3	3.8
Blacks/African Americans should build and maintain their own communities.	2.6	3.3
I must do all I can to restore Blacks/African Americans to their position of respect in the world.	3.2	3.4
It hurts me when I see a(nother) Black/African American discriminated against.	3.6	3.9
It is important that Blacks/African Americans decide for themselves what to be called and what their needs are.	3.6	3.7

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The final paper assignment asked students to apply an African-centered perspective to a case study of an African-American family presenting for or receiving services. The paper was scored with a rubric assessing whether each paper:

Described principles of the Nguzo Saba (Kwanzaa):
- Unity (Umoja)
- Self-determination (Kujichagulia)
- Collective work and responsibility (Ujima)
- Cooperative economics (Ujamaa)
- Purpose (Nia)
- Creativity (Kuumba)
- Faith (Imani

Described the four key principles of the Ntu model:
- Harmony
- Balance
- Interconnectedness
- Authenticity

Applied the five phases of practice of the Ntu model:
- Harmony
- Awareness
- Alignment
- Actualization
- Synthesis

FINDINGS

- 68% explained how the Nguzo Saba is integrated with the Ntu model.

- Only 49% accurately described all four key principles of the Ntu model.

- In contrast, 95% of the students (all but one) appropriately applied all of the phases of practice from the Ntu model to the case.

CONCLUSIONS/IMPLICATIONS

Results of analysis of outcomes of this course on advanced interpersonal practice with an Africentric emphasis led to at least two primary conclusions:

(1) Students in such a course are able to maintain or increase their overall level of Africentricity. The absence of significance here may be associated with unmeasured differences related to racial and ethnic diversity in the make-up of the class, the race of the instructor, and individual level factors such as a majority of class members identifying as African American and past experience with exposure to Africentricity (formal or informal).

(2) Students having completed such a course are able to apply the acquired model to a relevant practice situation. The lower proportion of students who were able to demonstrate understanding of the underlying theory and concepts may reflect a tendency of many Master of Social Work students to focus more on practice ('how to') and less on theory ('why') or a lack of clarity of the assignment.

Results have implications for:

(1) expanding quantitative study to include sociodemographic and other person-centered variables and sample-based reliability and validity measurement, and

(2) including qualitative study of reflections of students and of the instructor.

References: Cokley, K., & Williams, W. (2005). A psychometric examination of the africentric scale: Challenges in measuring Africentric values. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(6): 827-843.

Phillips, F. B. (1990). NTU psychotherapy: An afrocentric approach. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 17(1): 55-74.