

## Evaluating an Interdisciplinary and Multi-Pedagogical Approach to Equipping Students to Create Social Change

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Modern social problems are complex, multifaceted, and challenging to solve. Scholars are increasingly applying the concept of social innovation as a path to addressing social issues. Social innovation is an interdisciplinary framework for producing social change that requires creativity, problem-solving skills, and collaboration across systems. Higher education is progressively understanding the need to provide interdisciplinary educational opportunities for students; however, little is known about the effectiveness and impact of providing interdisciplinary learning experiences grounded in a social innovation framework. This article describes and analyzes an interdisciplinary summer fellowship program focused on social innovation for graduate students in social work, business, and the humanities and social sciences. The program employed multiple pedagogical approaches, including classroom-based instruction, field learning, and interdisciplinary teamwork. We used qualitative and quantitative pre- and post-evaluation student feedback to examine students' learning and overall experiences. We found that the fellowship was a dynamic learning experience, through which students strengthened their communication skills and translated academic concepts into practical ideas. The experience also impacted the students' career trajectories, influencing students to pursue careers that involved working toward social progress in a variety of ways.

It is evident that difficult and complicated social problems require dynamic and multifaceted solutions, wherein systems and disciplines collaborate to produce change. To confront complex social issues, changemakers need to be able to analyze and synthesize information from a variety of sources and articulate solutions to audiences with varied perspectives (Spelt et al., 2009). Interdisciplinary education exposes students to real-world situations, in which professionals collaborate with stakeholders with differing disciplines, views, and motives. Blake et al. (2013) define interdisciplinary education as "disciplines working collaboratively, sharing their insights and methods in an attempt to go beyond their own boundaries to address whatever issue or question that concerns them." (p. 11). Additionally, Holley (2018) points out that interdisciplinary approaches are seen as "responsive to social, economic, and natural challenges that traditional disciplinary inquiries are not" (p. 1). Further, the knowledge produced through interdisciplinary education is integrative, reflecting not merely a combination of perspectives but also integrating different world views and skills (Spelt et al., 2009). To that end, it is incumbent on higher education systems to develop interdisciplinary educational opportunities to help equip students with the skills needed to thrive in diverse cross-system work settings.

Although the notion of interdisciplinary education has garnered a sheen of current popularity and interest, there is little consensus about the specific parameters these concepts include or established best practice models for integrating interdisciplinary approaches in higher education in innovative and effective ways. As noted by Lattuca et al. (2017), the research to date lacks a thorough understanding of how interdisciplinary

education impacts student learning and development. Schmidt (2008) suggests that interdisciplinarity is "everywhere and nowhere" (p. 54); although frequently discussed as a practice, the definition and best practices are murky. Interdisciplinary education opportunities vary widely in their approaches and program models and, consequently, in their effectiveness (Lattuca et al., 2017). As much of the prior research on graduate-level interdisciplinary education initiatives focuses on health sciences and health care settings (Abu-Rish et al., 2012; Gould et al., 2015; Institute of Medicine, 2015), there is a particular need for research describing and evaluating components of interdisciplinary education programs outside of the health arena.

Like interdisciplinary education, the concept of social innovation is also gaining considerable traction in higher education, spawning the generation of manifold centers, programs, and initiatives at higher education institutions across the United States and globally (McBeth, 2018). Social innovation is increasingly seen as a way to address some of the world's most pressing problems, such as climate change and resource scarcity (UNICEF, 2020). Social innovation is an inherently collaborative concept, defined as "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals" (Phills Jr et al., 2008, p. 39). Thus, social innovation captures a range of institutional and systems-level changes, from the development of social entrepreneurship programs to help individuals build skills while generating income to the building of partnerships to directly address poverty as a root cause of child maltreatment (Berzin, 2012; Ferguson, 2013). At the macrolevel, social innovation

can be used to impact policy and regulations; at the mesolevel, it can be used to develop new business models or organizational structures; and at the microlevel, it can impact the approach of individual practitioners (Schröer, 2021). Social innovation is not “owned” by any one discipline or field. Scholars have observed that addressing complex social problems in innovative ways requires harnessing diverse knowledge sources and multiple perspectives (Rodriguez et al., 2017). In addition, Archibald et al. (2018) note that social innovation and social entrepreneurship may be especially critical in the pursuit of social and economic justice for people affected by forms of structural oppression, such as mass incarceration and racism.

Although numerous approaches to teaching social innovation exist, approaches that provide collaboration and experiential learning opportunities are consistent with the social innovation ethos of creativity, relevance, and impact (Rodriguez et al., 2017; Stringfellow, 2017). The purpose of this article is to add to the evaluation literature on interdisciplinary education and social innovation education initiatives by providing a description and synthesis of the perspectives of students participating in an interdisciplinary fellowship program for social innovation at one university. Specifically, this analysis aimed to evaluate the program’s effectiveness as an approach to facilitating students’ learning about social innovation and building career and leadership skills.

### **Program Description**

The fellowship program was developed by the leadership of a School of Social Work and School of Management at a large research university in the northeastern United States to train graduate students to work collaboratively to create innovative solutions and programs for local nonprofit, for-profit, and governmental organizations. The program was launched in 2017 with a cohort of eight Masters of Social Work (MSW) and eight Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students. In 2018, the program expanded to include 10 MSW students, 10 MBA students, and three graduate students from the humanities and social sciences in the university’s College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). In 2019, the program expanded further and included 10 MSW students, 10 MBA students, and 10 CAS graduate students. The program was paused in 2020 due to COVID-19 concerns. Students received a stipend as well as course credit. The program instructors had full-time appointments with the School of Management and the School of Social Work, which indicates a robust interdisciplinary education program model (Lattuca et al., 2017).

The program was structured as a summer fellowship, which took place in the summer after the

MSW and MBA students’ first year; graduate students from CAS were at varying points in their master’s or doctoral programs. Using a consulting model, students worked on interdisciplinary teams for 8 weeks to complete project deliverables developed by host organizations, which applied to host students through an open call distributed throughout the local community. Teams consisted of one MSW and one MBA student in the first year, while in the second year, three MSW-MBA teams were joined by a CAS graduate student. In 2019, all teams included one student each from the School of Social Work, School of Management, and CAS. Deliverables were based on specific projects proposed by the host organizations. Examples of past projects included developing a point-of-sale system for a store selling accessories and other fabric items made by members of the immigrant and refugee community and creating a voter-education marketing campaign targeting people in low-income neighborhoods following changes in state election laws. Over the 3 years of the fellowship, the majority of the host organizations were nonprofit organizations, but also included for-profit companies and branches of local government. The fellowship culminated in a pitch competition, open to the public, in which student teams made 5-minute pitches to win a cash prize for their host organization to continue and expand their innovation project.

The fellowship also included a classroom component, co-taught by faculty from social work and management, to introduce students to social innovation concepts and creative approaches to solving complex problems, such as design thinking (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). The classroom portion of the fellowship blended social work and management content. From the social work perspective, students learned about the complex and multifaceted nature of social problems, the application of a systems perspective to understand microlevel social change within a larger structural context, and the typical ways in which the social sector attempts to remedy them, including the use of trauma-informed care in social services. The management portion of the course focused on project management, creative problem-solving, and how the private sector has attempted to address social problems. In the first year of the fellowship, students worked onsite at their host organization placements Monday through Thursday, convening for a full-day session on Fridays for classroom instruction and debriefing. Based on student feedback, the program shifted in 2019 to cover the foundational material in a weeklong classroom-based course before students began their organizational placements. Fridays were reserved for half-day debriefing sessions, in which students engaged in group problem-solving and practicing for the pitch competition.

## Methods

### Positionality, Research Questions, and Data Source

This analysis was designed and conducted by two social work faculty who co-taught in the fellowship program. The first author began teaching in the program in its third year, while the second author taught all 3 years. We designed the analysis as a mixed-methods program evaluation of the social innovation fellowship. The evaluation focused on three central research questions: (1) What social innovation-related learning outcomes were associated with participating in the fellowship? (2) How did the use of multiple pedagogical approaches in the fellowship shape students' learning and overall experience and impressions of the program? and (3) In what ways did participating in the fellowship affect students' future career goals and planned trajectories?

To answer the research questions, we used quantitative and qualitative course evaluation data completed by fellowship students (see Appendix A for a list of the questions). The analysis focused solely on the research questions; we did not analyze students' overall satisfaction with the program or with the instructors. The student fellows were asked to voluntarily complete a pre-program evaluation at the beginning of the first week of the fellowship and a post-evaluation immediately following the program's conclusion. Because there were substantial changes to the program structure following the inaugural year of the fellowship in 2017, including the addition of students from the humanities and social sciences and repackaging the classroom-based instruction on foundations of social innovation to a one-week class, we restricted our analysis to data collected from students in 2018 and 2019. Programming was consistent across these 2 years, with the major difference being that in 2018 only three of 10 student teams included a CAS graduate student. In contrast, in 2019, these students were present on all 10 student teams. Our analysis of previously collected course evaluation data received a determination that it was not considered human subjects research from the Institutional Review Board at our university.

### Analysis

To answer our first research question, we conducted paired t-tests to analyze the change in quantitative data from a set of close-ended questions on the pre- and post-assessments measuring students' knowledge and confidence levels on social innovation-related domains (e.g., awareness of social problems; ability to apply design thinking; comfort working in interdisciplinary teams). To address our second and third research questions, we conducted a qualitative thematic analysis

of students' written responses to open-ended evaluation questions, which were only included in the post-evaluation (Remington et al., 2017). As study authors, we independently reviewed the students' responses, noting critical themes concerning our research questions, and identifying quotations that exemplified these themes. We then met periodically to discuss our notes, elaborate on the emergent themes, and confirm the selection of illustrating quotations. As instructors in the program, we acknowledge our subjectivity and potential for bias, e.g., to focus on positive aspects of the program or to minimize students' critiques and critical responses. Throughout the analysis, we engaged in reflexive inquiry—both independently and collaboratively—to name and critically examine the assumptions and values that may have informed our overall analysis of the data and which data points were highlighted or de-emphasized (Taber et al., 2010).

## Results

### Quantitative Analysis

Student fellows were asked to complete pre- and post-fellowship assessments focused on their confidence in several areas, including working collaboratively as part of an interdisciplinary team and their ability to apply social innovation principles. Students evaluated their skills using a 1–5 scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1, to “strongly agree” = 5, with 3 indicating “neutral.” In 2018, 16 of 23 fellows completed both the pre- and post-assessments, and in 2019, 23 of 30 fellows completed both. This yielded 39 paired assessments for analysis.

Quantitative findings are summarized in Table 1. On average, students rated themselves higher on the post-assessment than on the pre-assessment for all questions, although the magnitude of change varied. On pre-assessments, students felt generally competent in their ability to work in teams ( $M = 4.77, SD = 0.42$ ), work with peers from other disciplines ( $M = 4.46, SD = 0.63$ ) and their ability to impact change in the region ( $M = 4.05, SD = 0.81$ ). Thus, the post-assessments' magnitude of increase was small for these items, ranging from 0.10 to 0.39. For questions that evaluated more social innovation-specific skills, pre-assessment ratings were lower, and increases in self-ratings were statistically significant. Students reported significant gains in their perceived ability to formulate a pitch ( $t = -5.71, p < 0.01$ ), their awareness of social problems ( $t = -4.75, p < 0.01$ ), their ability to use creative problem-solving skills ( $t = -4.97, p < 0.01$ ), and their experience with social justice organizations ( $t = -4.23, p < 0.01$ ). Effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) for these significant findings ranged from 0.65 to 0.97, indicative of medium to large effects.

**Table 1.**  
*Comparison of Pre- and Post-Student Self-Assessments on Social Innovation Domains of Change (n = 39)*

Item	Pre-test <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-test <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
I believe I can impact significant change in the local social sector.	4.05 (0.81)	4.21 (0.79)	-1.18	0.12	0.02
I have experience working in an organization with social justice/social good aims.	3.82 (1.17)	4.62 (0.58)	-0.42	<0.01	0.86
I have experience working in teams.	4.77 (0.42)	4.85 (0.36)	-1.00	0.16	0.20
I am comfortable working collaboratively with peers from different fields or disciplinary orientations.	4.46 (0.63)	4.85 (0.36)	-3.79	<0.01	0.76
I am aware of the social problems impacting the local region.	3.49 (1.01)	4.13 (0.76)	-4.75	<0.01	0.72
I can understand social problems and issues from a systems perspective.	3.74 (0.98)	4.33 (0.83)	-4.90	<0.01	0.65
I can use and apply design thinking and creative problem-solving skills.	3.82 (0.78)	4.49 (0.59)	-4.97	<0.01	0.97
I am confident formulating a pitch and presenting my pitch to stakeholders.	3.54 (0.98)	4.31 (0.65)	-5.71	<0.01	0.93

### Qualitative Analysis

At the fellowship's conclusion, students were asked to complete an overall program evaluation, on which they gave qualitative feedback about their experience (see Appendix A for a list of questions). Nineteen students completed this evaluation in 2018 and 24 students completed it in 2019. The qualitative analysis of these responses ( $n = 43$ ) addressed our second and third research questions. The second research question inquired about how multiple pedagogical approaches were linked to students' learning and experience in the fellowship program. Themes emerged regarding distinct program elements, including classroom-based learning, placement-based experiential learning, and intentional interdisciplinary collaboration. The third research question explored the value of the fellowship program in shaping students' career trajectories. A central theme emerged, suggesting that the fellowship was meaningful in how students pictured their future careers but that this meaning varied for students in the MSW, MBA, and CAS graduate programs.

### Classroom-Based Learning: "Preparing for the Experience"

Students appeared to benefit from the classroom component of the fellowship. However, their assessments of the weeklong class that occurred before their placements and the Friday morning sessions they attended during their placements differed. Generally, students found the weeklong course to be valuable, with one MSW student calling it "stimulating and motivating," adding that they "enjoyed the professors in the program, who I thought were genuine, passionate, and open." Another student commented that the class was "helpful in preparing for the experience." However, some students expressed that the weeklong course could have been more useful if it focused more on applied knowledge that students could use in their placements. "It was nice getting some foundation before going in, but I found that I did not use much of anything that was discussed. Perhaps material more specific to working on groups, or organization of research (like a dissertation) would have been helpful," one social work student explained.

Students' evaluations of the Friday coaching sessions were more mixed. Although many students reported valuing the opportunity to prepare and practice

their pitches during these sessions, a prevailing sentiment was that too much time was devoted to presentations from guest speakers and team check-ins—activities that students often did not find to be generalizable or relevant to their own experiences. Some students expressed that the time would be better spent learning and practicing specific skills that they could immediately utilize in their placements. As one CAS student described, “The Friday sessions could have been used for skill-building activities focused on things like communication, visual rhetoric (for the posters), public speaking, active listening, motivational interviewing techniques, and data management.”

In 2019, one Friday session was devoted to participating in a service-learning project at one of the placement sites, where students had the opportunity to help construct furniture for low-income children and families. Some students commented positively on this in their evaluations and requested more opportunities for service learning. One MBA student contrasted this form of active learning with passive learning from guest speakers: “The guest speakers did not add much value to our experience in my opinion. It would have been much more valuable to do more Fridays at organizations so we could see or do the work ourselves and learn that way.”

***Placement-Based Experiential Learning:  
“Translating Academic Knowledge into Applicable  
Ideas”***

Students reported the ability to participate in a complementary field experience to be particularly beneficial to their learning, as explained by one MSW student “The ability to work, hands on, was very helpful to my education.” Further, students reported that having a placement experience so quickly after the classroom portion of the program allowed them to connect classroom content with real-world situations, or as one CAS student said “translating academic knowledge into applicable ideas.”

Students reported that the experience “stretched” them by placing them in novel organizational and issue contexts. As one MSW student explained, “This program pushed me in ways I could not have imagined and made me uncomfortable, in a good way, so I could grow and learn as a student and person.” The placement experience encouraged students to strengthen their communication and negotiation skills as they tried to manage projects as part of a team functioning within a larger organization. One CAS student elaborated:

One of the more valuable takeaways was the difference between the “best” option and the option people are more likely to actually implement. It had not occurred to me that when presented with logical, well-researched methods derived from evidence-based case studies that people in the field would attempt to refute

those plans with anecdotal evidence. I learned that persuasion is something much more personal.

Through this experience, students realized that having good ideas does not automatically lead to positive results; students also needed to be persuasive and collaborative with individuals who come from different backgrounds.

The placement experience impacted some students on a deeper, more personal level. Students in the MBA and CAS programs typically had not had as much exposure to social problems and working in nonprofit and government settings; thus, the fellowship program allowed them to “see” social problems. “As someone with no social work background or previous experience, participation in this program opened my eyes to some of the larger social issues that often get swept under the rug or purposely ignored in the daily exchanges of the corporate world,” an MBA student described. In this way, the qualitative data supported the quantitative findings, particularly the increase in student familiarity with social justice organizations and knowledge of social problems. Some students reported forming a personal connection with their placement site or even agreeing to volunteer post-fellowship.

“Nothing else I have done in my academic career has given me such an empowering and meaningful experience to which I can look back on with pride and gratitude. I am still planning to work with [placement site],” stated an MBA student.

***Interdisciplinary Team-Based Learning: “Pushed Me  
Out of my Comfort Zone”***

Working closely on an interdisciplinary team—conceptualized as a hallmark of the fellowship program—was a unique experience for most students. Students reported that the added viewpoints shared by their peers from different disciplines enhanced their learning and modified their own perspective. “Working with someone in another field not only gave me the opportunity to network but also helped me see problems through another lens,” an MSW student stated. A CAS student elaborated: “I had a rare opportunity to gain skills and experience far outside my area of expertise. This was a special program for me.”

In addition to gaining different disciplinary perspectives, the fellowship's interdisciplinary aspect also appeared to help students view their own skills and contributions in new ways. An MSW student stated that “the new skills, knowledge, and relationships I have gained from this experience pushed me out of my comfort zone but also highlighted my strengths across fields.” Students also commented about finding the program's interdisciplinary nature to be novel and unique compared to their previous educational experiences. In particular, MSW and MBA students were accustomed to

taking all of their classes within their home schools, as the structure of these master's programs allowed limited options for electives in other schools or departments unless a student was pursuing a dual degree. As one MBA student expressed, "It was great learning and getting to know students from other disciplines. I do not believe this is done often at the university level, therefore it was beneficial to work with them."

Some students felt that the interdisciplinary nature of the fellowship provided preparation for adapting to future workplaces. "I feel this program models what work will be like outside of school, which has helped me recognize areas for further growth and areas that I am passionate about in a work setting," an MSW student said. "I feel more prepared to share my vision and skill set."

Some students thought that the value of the program could have been enhanced if additional disciplines were included. Also, a few CAS students felt that their disciplines were not adequately integrated into the fellowship. "I would have appreciated more thought about integration of the [CAS] students into the overall structure of the program," one student expressed.

### ***Influence on Educational and Career Trajectories: "Doing What You Can to Meet People Where They're At"***

Students described the impact that participating in the fellowship had on their educational and career goals. Students' responses indicated that while the fellowship did not drastically alter their desired career trajectories, the experience affirmed students' cross-disciplinary commitments to social justice and prompted them to consider a variety of options for integrating social impact goals in their careers.

This theme was expressed differently for students in varying disciplines. For MSW students, participating in the fellowship affirmed their commitment to social work as a social justice-focused profession while also opening their eyes to a broader range of macro and nontraditional social work career possibilities. As one MSW student surmised, "[Fellowship program] has only further convinced me I am on the right path. I recognize now how many options for social impact there are, and they need not be in 'traditional' social work settings." Another MSW student specified that the program had helped them to recognize how social workers could work outside of nonprofit settings: "I feel like I am more open to working outside of the nonprofit sector as a social worker from this program."

MBA students articulated several ways in which their experience in the fellowship helped them to clarify avenues for creating social impact through business, which they hoped to pursue in their future careers. For example, one MBA student described a desire to obtain

employment with socially minded startups, rather than established corporations: "The more on-the-ground work I take part in, the less I find myself gravitating toward a career in corporate America.... So I seek to work in more startup-like communities where I feel that I can have a tangible impact like I did this summer." Other MBA students expressed social entrepreneurship goals: "[Fellowship program] has provided me with the confidence that I can create a positive social impact and eventually even start my own business with a social impact." One MBA student expressed that social-change goals could be pursued from any sector but required a humanistic orientation: "While I'm still not sure that I'll end up working for a nonprofit after I graduate, this experience has affirmed the importance of keeping people first, regardless of sector, and doing what you can to meet people where they're at." This sentiment was echoed by another MBA student who concluded, "The [fellowship program] makes me want to work with organizations with people in mind, not just profits."

CAS students were prompted to consider the avenues through which they could leverage their skills and backgrounds as researchers and scholars toward social-change goals in traditional academic and "alt-academic" careers. One student articulated an emerging interest in pursuing a nonprofit career: "It definitely makes me think it's plausible, even preferable, to seek a job in the nonprofit world rather than academia." Another CAS student added, "After completing the program, I could definitely see myself working in a similar organization that combines historical learning with socially conscious programming to serve various communities." One student found the experience to be freeing: "I've enjoyed being able to explore different interests without being bound by the restrictions of academia, and I think our work demonstrates that [student's academic discipline] doesn't have to be rote memorization and endless textual study." For some CAS students focused on traditional academic careers, the fellowship experience encouraged them to prioritize community engagement in their future research and dissemination. "I will likely make a greater effort in future work to enact change beyond just publishing papers or performing research by truly engaging with the local communities that I am working to assist," a student stated.

## **Discussion**

As highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, social problems are complicated and interconnected and cannot be successfully resolved through uncoordinated individual efforts or professions working in isolation (Wen et al., 2020). The fellowship evaluated in this article utilized multiple pedagogical approaches, anchored by social innovation concepts, to produce

tangible and organizationally defined deliverables reflecting social impact. Through the program, the students were stretched and forced to adapt and evolve their communication styles as part of interdisciplinary teams. The experience appeared to alter or reinforce the students' career trajectories, with some students considering work in the social sector for the first time and others being more convinced of their intention to devote their careers to social justice.

Unexpectedly, the most significant student improvement involved discipline-specific skills, such as knowledge of social problems or the ability to create and deliver a pitch. Business education emphasizes the importance of pitching a product or idea concisely and compellingly (Florin et al., 2007). This is not typically stressed to the same degree in social work or humanities and social science education. The week-long course, field experience, and teamwork with an MBA student could have provided MSW and CAS students with a deep dive into the world of pitching, which resulted in an improved pitching competence and confidence. Further, by having the fellowship culminate in a live pitch, students were forced to apply their newly acquired knowledge, which may have incentivized their learning of these novel skills. Similarly, understanding social problems and experience with social justice organizations are core aspects of social work training (Gatenio Gabel & Mapp, 2019) but less present in MBA and graduate CAS programs. Through the combination of program elements, it appeared that students across disciplines were able to increase their understanding of social problems in a meaningful way.

Researchers and advocates of interdisciplinary education have suggested that creating opportunities for collaboration across disciplines in higher education is important not only for student learning, but to prepare students for successful careers in diverse work environments and areas of practice (Ashby & Exter, 2019; McDonald et al., 2019). Although interdisciplinary education's intrinsic value and potential are apparent, research on the outcomes associated with different approaches for facilitating interdisciplinary learning—specifically for educating students across disciplines about social innovation—remains limited ((Bagelman & Tremblay, 2017; Lattuca et al., 2017). The summer fellowship program analyzed in this evaluation provides an example of an opportunity for students to gain social innovation skills and have sustained engagement with a diverse range of community organizations and with students from other disciplines—elements that can be particularly difficult to integrate into MSW and MBA curricula, given that they are highly structured around rigid accreditation criteria (Council on Social Work Education, 2015; Lock, 1999). Although there are other pathways to providing such opportunities, such as through cross-disciplinary social innovation

workshops (Pearl & Oliver, 2020), the chance to build collaborative relationships on interdisciplinary teams and to provide real-world deliverables appeared to be critical to students' learning in this evaluation and would be difficult to manifest without a fellowship or internship component.

Further, the addition of three graduate students from the humanities and social sciences in the second year of the fellowship and the expansion to include CAS graduate students on all student teams in the third year were unique aspects of the program. Although the literature contains a few examples of collaborations between schools of social work and schools of business on social innovation and social entrepreneurship (e.g., Archibald et al. 2016; Pearl & Oliver 2020), we were unable to locate any prior research describing and evaluating programming that included students pursuing MSWs, MBAs, and graduate degrees in the humanities and social sciences. As the fellowship was initially conceived by leadership from the School of Social Work and School of Management, some CAS students' comments suggested a feeling of being an “add on,” whose disciplinary background was not fully integrated into the fellowship experience. We view this as an area of growth for the fellowship, with possibilities including adding CAS faculty to the teaching team and integrating content on the humanities and social sciences' role in addressing social problems (Pedersen, 2016). The crisis of declining tenure-track positions in the humanities underscores the value of programs like the fellowship for humanities doctoral students in particular, offering students concrete ways of seeing the applicability of their skills as researchers, scholars, and meaning-makers in non-academic contexts—and being able to articulate that applicability to potential future employers (Hayot, 2018; Higgins & Daniels, 2015).

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, this study used secondary course evaluation data that was primarily intended for program evaluation and not generalizable research. Although we believe that this data's quantitative and qualitative analysis yielded valuable insights, the study was limited to the domains explored by the evaluation questions. Further research, such as conducting in-depth interviews with fellowship participants, would provide an opportunity to examine themes raised in this analysis in greater depth and address other related topics, such as how students applied foundational skills like design thinking in their placements. Second, the program evaluation did not track the students' demographic characteristics, such as gender, race/ethnicity, international student status, or prior work experience. Future research could examine how the fellowship and learning experiences may vary

for students from different backgrounds. It is also important to consider that students voluntarily chose to apply to and participate in this summer fellowship and are thus not representative of the larger body of students pursuing MSWs, MBAs, and graduate CAS degrees. The students received a stipend for their participation, which could have influenced their generally positive perceptions of the program. Last, as instructors in the program conducting this evaluation, we recognize that our worldviews on social innovation and interdisciplinary education as well as our affiliation with the program may have biased and shaped the evaluation findings, despite our efforts to practice transparency and reflexivity (Taber et al., 2010).

### Conclusion

As higher education continues to grapple with the notion of innovation at institutional and system-wide levels, there is a simultaneous need to help students across a breadth of academic and professional disciplines develop as innovative thinkers who can apply their skills and knowledge in practical contexts. An interdisciplinary social innovation fellowship program offers one model for teaching students core skills and concepts for innovation and social impact and providing students with opportunities to apply their learning in real time. The dissemination and further evaluation of such programs is a step toward breaking down the walls of disciplinary siloes and preparing a new generation of thinkers and practitioners who are equipped to address deeply entrenched social problems in resourceful and imaginative ways.

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## Appendix A

### Course Evaluation Survey Questions

Quantitative questions (pre- and post-test; answered on a 1–5 scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 5):

1. I believe I can impact significant change in the [local region] social sector.
2. I have experience working in an organization with social justice/“social good” aims.
3. I have experience working in teams.
4. I am comfortable working collaboratively with peers from different fields or disciplinary orientation.
5. I am aware of the social problems facing the region.
6. I can understand social problems and issues from a systems perspective.
7. I can use and apply design thinking and creative problem-solving skills.
8. I am confident formulating a pitch and presenting it to stakeholders.

Qualitative questions (post-test only):

1. What knowledge and/or skills did you contribute to your specific project/organization/ team?
2. What knowledge and/or skills did your partner(s) contribute to your specific project/organization/team?
3. Did your perception of the major values of your partner's discipline/field shift at all during the fellowship experience? If yes, how so?
4. What was your biggest challenge in working with a student from another discipline to address your organization's problem? Did this differ from your original perceived challenge?
5. After the program experience, what does social innovation mean to you?
6. After completing the program, what do you perceive to be the major social challenges? facing the region? Did your perceptions change?
- 7.