

Statement of the
Native American Social Work Studies Institute
Advisory/Development Committee
July 3, 2018

Good afternoon Chairwoman Louis and Committee Members.

The Native American Social Work Studies Institute Advisory/Development Committee is deeply appreciative of this opportunity to update you on our efforts and inform you regarding the intention of the work that will structure the Institute. The Institute's design will echo the call of tribal nations in our state "to respond to the growing complexities of issues and challenges facing tribal communities and the State of New Mexico" (All Pueblo Council of Governors, Resolution No. APCG 2017-06). The sovereign right of Native people to design and develop responses to challenges faced by families and children and their societies is affirmed in the resolution of the Legislative Education Committee of the Navajo Nation Council (Resolution No. NABIO-69-17). The Institute's structure will be comprised of three components: Curriculum and Faculty Development, Research, and Law and Policy.

Curriculum and Faculty Development.

This work is led by Committee members, Caroline Dailey, LISW, Director, Pueblo of Isleta Social Services, Regina Yazzie, LISW, Program Director, Family and Children's Services, Navajo Nation Department of Social Services and Melissa Riley, Ph.D., Owner, Native Community Development Associates, Inc. and Independent social worker for the Pueblo of Laguna Tribal Court. These members have decades-long experience as front-line practitioners, managers, program developers, educators and advisors/consultants to tribal, state and federal governments. They possess expert knowledge regarding the mores and norms that guide social interactions in their communities which enables them to assess and devise useful approaches to behavioral change within the context of the person's and families' lived environment. The Committee will offer four courses in the 2019/2020 school year that will address central issues in family and children's practice with particular focus on Indian Child Welfare Act practice. Courses will be offered to students enrolled in the School's degreed programs and to tribal and off-reservation program personnel primarily through the School's long-distance learning facilities which allow the students to access classes at their work places and/or the privacy of their homes. At the present time only one-third of the tribal workforce is professionally trained.

A faculty development campaign will be launched to attract practitioners who are interested to teach and join the ranks of academia. Faculty development will focus on professionally-trained family and children/social services personnel who will be assisted by Committee members and School faculty to prepare for teaching duties.

The construction of an Institute bibliography is managed by Diana Tsoodle-Nelson, MSW, and a recent graduate of Highlands School of Social Work. The annotated bibliography will include texts, articles from mainstream social work journals, films and other media. Where possible, the bibliography will include links to access full texts of articles and other entries. The Committee is also assisting the School to increase the numbers of Native field instruction sites where students have hands-on education in the provision of services.

Research.

The Institute will introduce an indigenous research methodology based on the paradigm developed by Shawn Wilson (Metis) in his text, Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods. The methodology's orientation focuses on questions raised by the community itself to avoid problems of mainstream research which relies on "comparison[s] made between the culture of the "studied" and that of the "Studier" (Wilson, 2008, 17). "The development of an indigenous research paradigm is of great importance to indigenous people because it "incorporate[s] their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs" and encourages the development of indigenous theory and methods of practice," a central concern expressed in both Navajo and Pueblo resolutions. The introduction of the indigenous research paradigm will be addressed in both the classroom and the communities. It is necessary to introduce the information simultaneously so that research and methodologies used are understood by leadership and program personnel.

Law and Policy.

The initial effort of this component led by Elizabeth Duran, MSW, MPH, Director of Pojoaque Pueblo Social Services Department, and Evelyn Blanchard, MSW, Ph.D., involves legislative establishment of the Institute as was done in 2005 for the Bilingual/Bicultural concentration that responds to the needs of our state's Hispano/Latino communities. The Committee is collaborating with Cynthia Chavers, CYFD, Federal Reporting Bureau Chief, who is overseeing the implementation of a protective services methodology to educate the workforce to different assessment/diagnostic tools that focus on safety and risk in a determination to remove or not remove a child from the family. Inappropriate removal of Native children from their families was a central concern in the enactment of the Indian Child Welfare Act and its legacy continues. Of the 2700 children currently in state custody, almost half are Native children. The current situation is demonstrably inequitable in light of the fact that only ten-percent of the state's population is Native. The circumstance is especially troubling based on the knowledge that the majority of inmates in correctional institutions were foster children. It is reported that 79% of inmates in federal juvenile correction institutions are Native.

Collaboration with Facundo Valdez School of Social Work.

On the heels of Dr. Cristina Duran's appointment as Dean of the School, the NASWSI Advisory/Development Committee was established to work collaboratively with the School to construct the Native American Clinical Practice Concentration and implement other components of the Institute. When the Bilingual/Bicultural concentration was established in 2005, Duran was given responsibility for its implementation. She is providing financial support to cover meeting expenses for Committee work sessions and is preparing an arrangement to transfer unused project funds for Committee work. She is providing assistance to the bibliography project from Helen Robertson who manages the Albuquerque campus library and graduate assistant Marisa Nochumson. Prior to her appointment, Duran joined community members in discussions about their concerns and aspirations and connected with efforts being undertaken by the people that could be augmented by the School.. During our short time working together a solid collegial relationship has developed between Duran and Committee members and we are very appreciative of the respect and openness she displays in our interactive efforts.

Request for endorsement.

The NASWSI Advisory/Development Committee requests the endorsement of the Interim Indian Affairs Committee to introduce a bill in the upcoming 2019 Legislative Session to establish the Native American Social Work Studies Institute within the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work, New Mexico Highlands University. Thank you for consideration of our request.

Respectfully submitted:

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Diana Tsoodle-Nelson, NMHU, FVSSW graduate

Wilson, Shawn. 2008. Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods. Fernwood Publishing:
Halifax & Winnipeg