

Proposal: Establish the Nation's First Native American Social Work Program
at Highlands University, School of Social Work

The Current Situation:

There is no Native American social work education program anywhere in the United States. It is remarkable, though perhaps not surprising, that a population that could benefit from good social work as much as any in the country, with as unique and complex social dynamics and challenges as any, and with a history of oppression like no other, is given inadequate attention in the programs training social work academics and practitioners.

At the 1974 founding of the New Mexico Highlands University, School of Social Work its mission statement pledged focus on Hispanic and Native American social work education. Today the school has done an admirable job in providing the Hispanic focus. It offers a bilingual/bicultural sequence of study taught by Hispanic faculty to prepare Hispanic and non-Hispanic students for work in Latino communities. Courses in this sequence, such as, The Latino Family, Advanced Multicultural Practice, Spanish Field Practicum Seminar and Bilingual/ Bicultural Immersion are part of the core curriculum and can be taken to meet core graduation requirements.

While the school has done a better job than others addressing Native Americans, the School has been unable to give sufficient focus to the development of Native American courses and faculty. No Native Americans have been employed as tenured faculty at the University. The pledged focus on Native American education is comprised of periodic elective courses, field placements and "special emphasis on the Hispanic and Native American population of New Mexico and the Southwest," contained in course descriptions.

This has resulted in here, as it has across the country, a gap in the development of knowledge necessary to the construction of Native American social work curricula and nurturance of Native social work faculty. As noted above, there is no Native American social work education program anywhere in the country. In 2010 the Council on Social Work Education which accredits schools of social work reported Native American content courses being taught in only six social work schools.

This is a proposal to remedy this situation by establishing the first Native American social work program in the country at New Mexico Highlands University.

The Proposal:

The effort would be initiated through the establishment of a Native American Social Work Institute within the School of Social Work. The institute would concentrate on curriculum development, preparation of faculty and the participation of the state's Native population to assure that the school's curriculum is responsive to their needs. The work of the Institute would include:

1. Develop a curriculum
 - a. Aside from establishing a curriculum development committee or advisory team, this would involve conducting a survey of educational needs and practice methods of public and tribal program personnel and researching the best existing curricula. The Administrator of the Albuquerque campus would sit on the committee or advisory team
 - b. The survey would identify methodologies and practices that yield positive outcomes in various practice areas which would be integrated into class and placement course offerings.
 - c. Survey data would also be used to identify areas of needed research.
2. Expand Native American field practicum sites to include placements at the executive and management levels. Currently most Native American practicum sites are concerned with direct services.
3. Develop Native faculty. Expand the opportunity for Native social workers to teach. Current and prospective Native American instructors would receive assistance to develop elective courses some of which would be developed to meet core graduation requirements.
4. Design research courses and projects based on indigenous research methodologies. An example of research subjects is an examination of the ICWA placement provisions and the use of the extended family.
5. Assist the School to assure adequacy of library texts and e-service materials.
6. Produce workshops, seminars and institutes responsive to the current and on-going training needs of tribal and off-reservation program personnel based on survey data.
7. Initiate a national Native American Social Work Summer Institute to offer Native American courses not available to students in other schools of social work.

Proposed funding:

1. Existing School of Social Work budget for space and material support. The School is reported to have an opening for the appointment of a tenure track faculty member. It is proposed that the appointment be given to a Native American who would build and direct the Native American Social Work Institute.
2. Project-specific state appropriation.
3. Training fees from workshops, seminars and institutes.

Assistance needed:

Cost analysis.

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