

Native American Social Work Studies Institute  
at New Mexico Highlands University, Facundo Valdez School of Social Work

A Prospectus

The Native American Social Work Studies Institute (NASWSI, Institute)) is established “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 response to challenges faced by families and children and their societies is addressed by the legislatively authorized NAABIK’IYATI’ Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.

The Dine’, Apache and Pueblo people have strived over the centuries to exercise their sovereign right to assure appropriate responses to the needs of the people. The struggle to end the destructive and long-term damaging effects of the nation’s assimilationist policies and to provide an appropriate education for Native people is legendary and testament to the significance of education in tribal thought. It is this struggle that propels efforts to establish a Native American Social Work Program at New Mexico Highlands University, Facundo Valdez School of Social Work (Resolution No. NABIO-69-17).

The Institute will be situated within New Mexico Highlands University, Facundo Valdez School of Social Work and the first effort anywhere in the country by a school of social work to establish a program of study and development to respond directly to the call of tribal governments for acknowledgement of their sovereign right to determine content and focus of education to prepare students for work in their communities. This accomplishment was reached through centuries’ long struggles by tribal leadership to gain control over the education of their people and the right to define adaptable response to societal change impacting tribal communities as acknowledged in the 2009 Tribal/State Collaboration Act.

A Native American Social Work Program Advisory/Development Committee (the Committee) made up of practicing Native social work professionals has been constituted to oversee curriculum and faculty development, establish research focus and identify law and policy issues to be studied and acted upon. Dean Duran has designated Associate Professor Kipling Coggins to serve as the School’s liaison to the Committee. The establishment of the Native American Social Work Studies Institute at New Mexico Highlands University will have broad and deep impact throughout Indian country and brings the opportunity for the development of Native social work practice and theory as an integral and scholarly area of study within the profession of social work.

### **Curriculum and Faculty Development**

Curriculum and faculty development will be guided by the needs enunciated in the resolutions of the All Pueblo Council of Governors and the NAABIK’IYATI Committee of the Navajo Nation Council.

#### Curriculum:

The theme of development will take its cue from tribal leadership's comprehension of the complex challenges and opportunities faced and core foundational values upon which the education of social workers employed in their communities must be based.

Initial work focus is construction of the Native American Clinical Practice Concentration curriculum to be offered to advanced practice and second year social work students. The concentration will reflect the knowledge and skills levels needed to work effectively and productively in Native communities through a course of study that meets core graduation requirements. Courses will be offered on campus and on-line. The members of the Committee have over two hundred years combined practice experience and possess expert knowledge of efficacious practice in the communities in which they work. Initial course development will be concerned with current needs of practice, e.g., Indian Child Welfare Act: Law and Social Work Practice. Course development will follow the established procedural requirements for approval through the school's curriculum committee.

The philosophical thrust of curriculum development will be guided by tribal society's core values of love, respect, gratitude, and interdependence maintained through obedience to the society's rules, mores and norms which sets in motion the opportunity to establish codes of ethics and standards of practice for the tribes of New Mexico. The establishment of tribal social work codes of ethics and standards of practice creates a performance baseline useful to development of program descriptions and central to performance requirements. More broadly, these codes and standards are requisite to tribal/state discussions and negotiations related to regulatory and policy determinations and implementation.

#### Faculty:

Tribal leadership's call for preparation of social workers equipped to "respond to the growing complexities of issues and challenges facing tribal communities and the State of New Mexico" will guide faculty development. For decades tribal governments have supported the scholarship of their members with the expectation that knowledge and skill would be brought back to their communities. Over time tribal officials and personnel have developed a clearer definition of knowledge and skill levels and requirements that support the integrity of the tribal family and the well-being and continuance of the people.

Initial 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. At present only one-third of the twenty Pueblo family and children's/social service programs is staffed with professionally-trained workers. Initial faculty development will expose program directors to classroom teaching through guest lecture opportunities and co-teaching.

A faculty development campaign will be launched to attract practitioners who are interested to teach and join the ranks of academia. Workers with varying levels of social work education and training can learn about teaching and academia as a career path. The campaign will be designed in collaboration with family and children/social services personnel and tribal officials to generate broader understanding of teaching requirements and advance efforts to increase the numbers of staff with interest to teach. The first cadre of instructors will be drawn from the Committee. Several members have extensive teaching experience in other schools of social work and education departments.

### **Research:**

Overwhelmingly the subject of research in Indian Country is determined outside the communities in which the conclusions and/or recommendations will be applied. Persistently, research conducted by outsiders is seen as problematic because “. . . there is always a comparison made between the culture of the “studied” and that of the “studier.” (Wilson, 2008, 17) The research element of the Institute will introduce an indigenous research methodology based on the paradigm developed by Shawn Wilson, Metis, presented in his book, Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods.

Part of the importance of developing an indigenous research paradigm is that we can use methods and forms of expression that we judge to be valid for ourselves. We can get past having to justify ourselves as Indigenous to the dominant society and academia. We can develop our own criteria for judging the usefulness, validity or worth of indigenous research and writing. We can decide for ourselves what research we want and how that research will be conducted, analyzed and presented. (Wilson, 2008, 14)

Wilson proposes that indigenous research methodology needs to go beyond the research topic “to incorporate their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs,” a position affirmatively taken in the resolutions of the Pueblo and Navajo councils. He advances that “[t]he development of an Indigenous research paradigm is of great importance to Indigenous people because it allows the development of Indigenous theory and methods of practice.” (Wilson, 2008, 19) The methodology driven by the question, “How will this research be of benefit to my community?” establishes ‘relational accountability’ among those involved in a research effort and accords the community the responsibility for equity in the process.

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 the methodologies used are widely understood by leadership and program personnel. These personnel are central to research topic decisions and have the responsibility to build a data base of information that most accurately defines needs and resources and provides direction for programmatic efforts that respond to the question: What is best for the people?”

Respectfully submitted,

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