

Learner-Centered Education Grants

2004 Final Report

1. Project Name and Project Director's Name. Include mailing address, phone and e-mail address.

Project Name: A Collaborative, Portable, Learning-Centered, 34-credit hour Master of Social Work Degree Program

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2. Brief Description of Project:

Arizona State University at the West Campus (Dept. of Social Work, Arizona State University at Tempe (School of Social Work), and Northern Arizona State University (Dept. of Sociology and Social Work) developed and conducted a collaborative, portable, learner-centered, 34-credit hour Master of Social Work (MSW) degree program. Twenty seven students initially enrolled in the program and began their course of study in the Summer of 2003.

In May of 2005, 24 MSW degrees were awarded to individuals successfully completing the program. One student, during the fall 2005 semester transferred to the ASUW program and is in the process of completing her degree. Another student will be completing her degree in December 2005.

The program utilized a cohort model. It was designed to serve rural and reservation-based social work professionals. The Flagstaff location and the compressed weekend format allowed American Indian, reservation-based residents and others in surrounding rural areas to drive to Flagstaff for the weekend only to attend classes. Field placements were completed in their own communities, and were often done in agencies where they were employed (work variance field internships).

ASU Tempe campus and ASU West campus delivered the required coursework (8 classes or 24 credit hours) and NAU delivered the field practicum component of the program (10 credit hours). An advisory board composed of faculty from the three campuses and representatives

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of rural and American Indian social service agencies, including recently graduated MSWs, provided feedback and guidance to ensure that the program was meeting its stated objectives.

The overall goal of the learner-centered project was to provide support for the development of Arizona's rural social service workforce by expanding the educational and professional opportunities for targeted individuals (i.e., Bachelor-level social workers in rural Arizona).

3. Goals, Outcomes and Assessments

a. Goals and Primary Accomplishments:

GOAL 1: Providing access to bachelor level social workers in rural areas with particular emphasis on attracting American Indian social workers as well as nontraditional working students.

Outcome Measures: Of the 24 MSW successful degree candidates, 14 were American Indian, or 58%. All (100%) of the successful candidates were nontraditional working students.

GOAL 2: To address the unmet social service needs in Northern Arizona due to the shortage of MSW-educated professionals. A very small percentage of the estimated 300 rural social workers in Arizona hold the MSW degree and are providing services to rural and tribal areas in both northern and southern Arizona.

Outcome Measures: At present 100% of the graduates are working as social work professionals in social services, behavioral health, criminal justice, and hospice and/or health care. All American Indian graduates are employed in their native communities, the majority of them working for tribal social service agencies. Graduates are employed in the following communities: Flagstaff, Camp Verde, Cottonwood, Prescott, Keams Canyon, Tuba City, Holbrook, Winslow, Polacca, Kingman, Kayenta (all Arizona communities), and Crown Point, New Mexico.

GOAL 3: To deliver an MSW program that allows for a contextual "fit" of the curriculum. To teach practice and theory in the setting where students will ultimately use their skills in order to best meet the needs of the people they are serving.

Outcome Measures: (Please refer to previous reports for outcomes and measures that were ongoing. The information presented in this section lists the final outcomes and measures not yet reached in prior reports)

- ◆ Twenty-four students graduated from the program. They participated in graduation exercises at the ASU West Campus in May. One student relocated to Tucson and will finish her degree at ASU West campus in December 2005, while another student from Tuba City will complete her degree in December 2005.
- ◆ The eighth and final course, SWG Administration, was taught in the Spring of 2005.

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- ◆ All students had completed their field practicum by the Spring of 2005.
- ◆ The students presented their Applied Projects at a Poster Session and Reception in Tuba City, AZ, in April 2005. Tuba City is a northern Arizona community located on the western end of the Navajo Nation. The event was held at Dine College. Over 100 people were in attendance, including students and their families, faculty, administrators, and social workers and educators from northern Arizona. Refreshments were served and each student had an opportunity to describe and explain their research projects and posters.
- ◆ Recruitment for another cohort began in January 2005 and in July classes began. These students will graduate in May 2007. At the present time there are 13 students in the new cohort.

4. Problems or Issues Encountered:

There were few problems in the implementation of this project. Two major issues were identified, one was on-going and the other was on the horizon.

Many of the students in the program managed multiple demands of work and family with limited resources. At the same time, the academic preparation of many students was not as strong as would be ideal. As a consequence of this constellation of factors, a number of the students in the program needed academic support outside the classroom. This was particularly true with regards to the Applied Project. Many of the students lacked a solid foundation in research and statistics, and many of them did not have access to computers to input survey responses and complete their statistical computations. Fortunately, funds were secured through ASU West campus to hire an instructor who provided invaluable one on one as well as group instruction so that students could successfully complete their Applied Projects.

Sustainability was the second problem facing the program. In the spring, the decision was made to continue to program because monies were located (in the College of Extended Education) to fund the program, and these funds, along with tuition dollars collected from a new cohort, were enough to fund the Coordinator Position. It may be necessary to secure additional funding to pay for the Administrative Assistant position and other expenses such as travel and office supplies.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Directions:

It is clear that this project has met its major objectives and has graduated Master Level social workers who are now meeting the (previously unmet) needs of people in their communities, whether they are working on tribal lands or other rural communities.

The most recent cohort (students who will graduate in May 2007) is considerably smaller than previous cohorts. The smaller class size may suggest that given the fact that the program has now been offered three times and has successfully graduated over 50 MSW students, there are simply fewer people in northern Arizona who desire to earn an MSW.

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Another important factor has been that the most recent graduates and those in the current cohort all had earned a BSW, which was a prerequisite for entering the program. There are many advantages to an Advanced Standing Model, not the least of which are that it is cost effective and students can complete their graduate degree in a shorter period of time. However, there are drawbacks to offering a graduate program to only those who have already earned a BSW.

In the last four years the program coordinator's office has received numerous inquiries from persons who want to earn an MSW but hold an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than social work. Due to work and family commitments, it is not feasible for these people to commute to Phoenix to earn an MSW. Offering a part-time 2 ½ to 3 year graduate program for these potential students in northern Arizona might be something that is kept on the table as a possibility for the future.

Given the way that Arizona continues to grow it is recommended that programs similar to the project in Flagstaff be considered in other parts of the state. In Yuma, for example, NAU has recently graduated a number of BSW students who most likely will be very interested in pursuing an advanced degree in the next 2-5 years. An MSW program that allows for a contextual "fit" of the curriculum, much like the one offered in the northland, seems very appropriate and timely.

6. Has this project led to sustainable change in your department/college? Describe:

This project has led to positive and sustainable changes at all three Universities. It has allowed the departments to expand into previously unexplored areas and reinforced their commitment to serve American Indian communities and other rural communities in Arizona.

7. Impact:

- a. Have other faculty been affected by this project? Yes No. If so, describe:
Faculty at all three institutions have been supportive of this non-traditional project.
- b. Number of courses affected/involved. Nine courses
- c. Number of students affected. 25 students

8. Significant Outcome:

What was the most significant outcome based on learner-centered principles that occurred through your project?

The most significant outcome has been that this non-traditional, learner-centered project has strengthened and expanded the rural social workforce in Arizona. There are now more social workers in rural Arizona who are functioning at a Masters Level, who have acquired new knowledge and skills through this program, and are providing more effective services to individuals, families, and groups within their respective communities. This outcome could never have been achieved in a traditional graduate program.

**Note: This report was prepared by
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