

Understanding Our Community: Toward A Responsive Social Work Curriculum

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Abstract:

Introduction: Through student-conducted interviews (N = 38) and surveys (N = 72) with community stakeholders, this project helped us uncover the most pressing needs in Valley communities, the skills and knowledge social work professionals most value, any skills and knowledge they wish they had received more training on during their time at as a social work student, their understanding of the relationship between DSWE and Fresno/the Valley, and their ideas for increasing DSWE's level of engagement and impact. A strengthened partnership between DSWE and local practitioners may assist us to engage the strengths of the communities we strive to serve. For many DSWE students, English is a second, third, or fourth language. The strength of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural student body can be squandered when the curriculum is not responsive to this context. In an analysis regarding the sociocultural strengths of the Latino community, Osterling (2001) found that immigrant and refugee students were more engaged in their education when the curriculum was designed to respect the intrinsic cultural knowledge that they brought to the classroom. Bragin et al. (2016) attempted to build a culturally relevant social work curriculum in Afghanistan. Some of the difficulties they faced included cultural and language-based diversity. The strength of the Bragin et al approach was the systemic partnership with the local communities to establish a sustainable way to educate social workers within the specific context where they would practice after graduation. This proposed project is one step in the direction of strengthening the cultural relevance of our social work curriculum in the central valley context.

Participatory curriculum development has been used to develop rural education regarding food security in sub-Saharan Africa (Wallace, 2007). One notable success of these efforts was a University in Ghana where undergraduate students were placed in an "off-campus, farmer focused experience" (p. 585). In an effort to meet the basic human needs of HIV/AIDS affected households in Zimbabwe De Souza et al. (2008) presented a case study regarding a fixed curriculum for food security and HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation. The case study presented a pre-designed curriculum as the intervention, but the

facilitators negotiated with participants about the order of the lessons, and necessary experiments to adapt to local needs. This project aims to understand strategies that can assist DSWE to strengthen the existing curriculum through feedback from practitioners who understand the context of social work practice in the central valley.

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Goals and Objectives: DSWE is currently undergoing a re-visioning process and considering making changes to its curriculum so that it may better serve the region. Having current students front and center in this process will help us make clear connections between stakeholder data and its immediate relevance for our curriculum. This work laid the foundation for continued student and community involvement in AY 2018-19 as DSWE determines how to integrate project findings into our curriculum, program offerings and administrative structure. A stronger DSWE means a greater potential for thriving individuals, families, and communities. Moreover, improved skills and attitudes toward research among DSWE students means better equipped graduates who are more likely to harness the tools of research for community improvement and be successful if they pursue the next level of social work education.