Proposal for Scholarship on Teaching and Learning

Engaging Intelligent Dialogue on Sensitive Issues With

Social Work Students

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Abstract

While training social work students to become culturally-competent practitioners is at the forefront of multicultural higher education, integrating diversity issues presents challenges for both students and faculty. The purpose of the project is to provide a safe learning environment in which social work students can gain cultural competency by extending multicultural education learning experiences beyond the time and space of the classroom.

Building on the applicant's previous research, this project will use instructional technology to promote social work student learning on diversity issues in the Field Seminar. Diversity homepage and discussion forum are offered online to teach diversity content and to facilitate open and honest dialogue on sensitive issues related to race, ethnicity, social class, economic status, sexual orientation, immigration, spirituality, aging, and disability.

The diversity assignment is designed to encourage student's critical thinking and self-reflection in the areas of cultural awareness and competence. Students can reflect upon their experience, delineate what was learned from it, and how it will inform their work in the future. The outcome evaluation will examine the efficacy of this educational approach in promoting improved diversity values, attitudes, and knowledge among MSW students.

It is expected that the use of innovative strategies such as online discussion forums (ODF) and diversity assignments (DA)—learning tools consistent with the premises of adult learning and self-efficacy theory—will enable students to gain a greater degree of diversity skills, knowledge, and values as outcomes of their social work education and field experiences.

Joint Proposal?   _____ Yes   _x_ No

Title of Project   _____

Duration of Project   1 year_____

Primary Investigator(s) _____

Email Address(es)   elee50@uncc.edu_____
UNC Charlotte SOTL
Grants Previously
Received (please
names of project, PIs,
and dates)   N/A_____

Allocate operating budget to Department of   Social Work_____

Account #	Award	Year One January to June
Faculty Stipend	Transferred directly from Academic Affairs to Grantee on May 15	$ 3,850
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	$ 5,065
911300	Special Pay (Faculty on UNCC payroll other than Grantee)	
915000	Student Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921150	Participant Stipends	
925000	Travel - Domestic	
926000	Travel - Foreign	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	$ 1,000
951000	Other Current Services	$ 500
	GRAND TOTAL	$ 10,415

Attachments:

1.   Attach/provide a narrative that explains how the funds requested will be used.

2.   Has funding for the project been requested from other sources? ___ Yes __x__ No. If yes, list sources.

Faculty Stipend: $ 3,850

This amount represents a request for a summer stipend in order to complete the time-consuming tasks of creation of Diversity Homepage, facilitation of online forum, management of Diversity Assignment, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. The applicant will teach not more than one term during the summer, concentrating on evaluation in the alternate summer term. (The applicant has applied for the Faculty Research Grant. If her FRG is funded, the budget for faculty stipend will be used to hire graduate students or instructors who can monitor the online discussion forum).

Graduate Students Salaries: $ 5,065

A graduate student (TBA) will assist in creating a Diversity Homepage and researching resources for multicultural education. The student will be paid at a rate of $11.00 per hour (pay rate of graduate research students within the College of Health and Human Services for a semester at 5 hours per week for 6 months. To hire an excellent GA, a competitive wage will be offered
(6 months x 4.33 weeks x 5hrs x $13= $1,688).

Another graduate student (TBA) will be hired at a rate of $11.00 per hour to work 10 hours per week for two semesters. Duties would involve setting up the online survey forms, online survey administration, verifying completion of the surveys and consent, and entering data.
(6 months x 4.33 weeks x 10hrs x $13= $3,377).

Educational Equipment $ 1,000

Multimedia developed for educational purpose will be purchased. These may include teaching videos, DVD, and interactive games.

Others
Diversity Paper Awards: $500
In order to increase incentive for students, Diversity Paper Award will be created within the Department of Social Work. The two best reflective papers will be selected by the review committee, and each student will be awarded $250.

October 26, 2010

Center for Teaching and Learning
UNC Charlotte, Atkins 149C

Re: Letter of Support for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grant – Dr. Othelia Lee

It is a pleasure to support Dr. Lee's application for a 2010 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) Grant. She is a first year, associate professor at UNC Charlotte with a specific interest and background in coursework examining human diversity.

Dr. Lee proposes a project to create a safe learning environment for social work students to gain cultural competency through the use of instructional technology. Her effort will be valuable in several ways. Foremost, students will be afforded a unique opportunity to dialogue and reflect upon on sensitive issues concerning multicultural education (e.g., concerning biases and stereotypes) in relationship to experiences in field placement.

At UNC Charlotte, diversity content is infused throughout the MSW Program. The proposed project will provide students the opportunity to pose, address, and reflect upon questions concerning human diversity via an online discussion forum. In social work education, facilitation of a culture of human interchange, especially in support for difference and diversity, is highly value and expected. Dr. Lee's project holds promise for further demonstrating the Department's commitment to create an educational environment for heightening awareness and understanding of diversity, especially in relationship to field education (Social Work's signature pedagogy).

Given Dr. Lee's proposed evaluation of educational outcomes, her project also holds promise for providing important information for consideration for use within the College of Health and Human Services and the University. It is very conceivable that other academic units will want to adopt a similar approach for promoting an appreciation and competencies related to diversity. Dr. Lee's project and evaluation plan are sound and stand to benefit social work education as well as the academic life of our university.

Sincerely,

Dennis D. Long, Ph.D.
Chair

Jane B. Neese, Ph.D.
Interim Dean

Project Narrative

A. Specific Aims

The <u>overall purpose</u> of the project is to implement a safe, stimulating learning environment in which social work students can gain cultural competency. To this end, three educational innovations will be introduced to extend multicultural learning experiences for students beyond the time and space of the classroom. Outcome evaluation will be conducted to examine the efficacy of these innovative educational approaches in improving multicultural values, attitudes, and knowledge among social work students.

The <u>specific objectives</u> of the project are:

- To facilitate intelligent dialogue by students on sensitive issues.

- To encourage students to reflect on diversity issues that they observe and experience in their field placement.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of students' multicultural education and field experiences.

B. Problem Statement and Rationale

In an increasingly multicultural world, it is essential that social work students understand the influence that race, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other cultural dynamics have on the development and effectiveness of the helping relationships with clients, programs, and communities. Yet, teaching courses on diversity and social justice in social and behavioral science disciplines poses special challenges for educators because of individual or collective student resistance, typified by reactions such as fear, guilt, denial, and anger (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000). Thus, educators must create an inclusive, open, and safe learning environment in which students can explore their thoughts and reactions—collectively and individually—to the material and the discussions it provokes. Achieving this is of paramount importance in helping

students gain self-awareness, which is absolutely critical to the learning process at professional schools.

To educate students to live and work in a culturally competent manner, most Master's of Social Work (MSW) programs require completion of a discrete semester-long course on cultural diversity in their foundation curriculum (Council for Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008). Typically, these courses provide future social work practitioners with opportunities to learn about different cultures and to examine various forms of oppression and the consequences they bring (Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000). Learners are encouraged to reflect on the social positions they occupy in relation to power and/or privilege (Tatum, 1992). UNCC does not require a discreet diversity course since our pedagogical approach is to infuse and integrate multicultural content across all curriculum. In our current curriculum, there is no mechanism to ensure that students gain the necessary cultural competency.

C. Planning and Pilot Works

Recent research suggests that instructional technology can play a significant role in facilitating dialogue on sensitive issues among social work students. Analyzing the type and content of conversations in an online discussion forum (ODF) that was a component of a traditional class, Lee, Brown, and Bertera (2010) found that diversity education was supported by using ODF as an adjunct to face-to-face class sessions. MSW students using an ODF to discuss diversity issues reported gains in cultural competence as a result of participation in the forum. These self-reported gains may reflect gains in feelings of self-efficacy as well, as these gains related to becoming a culturally competent practitioner (Lee & Bertera, 2007). Participants also reported other benefits from utilizing the ODF, which included positive impacts on relationships with classmates and on perceived technological competence.

Although previous research has reported successful application of the self-efficacy construct on instructional technology in various disciplines, results depend on students' acquired levels of self-efficacy and other variables. Multicultural educators must continue to determine whether and how their courses enable students to gain self-efficacy regarding culturally competent practice, acknowledging a gap in our current understanding of how to achieve cultural competency and self-efficacy. Building on the applicant's previous work, this study of educational innovation will explore whether the use of facilitated discussion and reflective written assignments can help achieve cultural competency.

D. Significance

The importance of this project is highlighted by the mandates of the CSWE's (accreditation authority in social work education) that content on diverse populations be integrated into curriculum. Educators must take responsibility for training social workers to be culturally competent, which involves the development of knowledge, self-awareness, respect, and skills to work with diverse populations. Social workers must be able to reflect on, acknowledge, and deal with their biases and stereotypes in order to work with clients in a positive way. Study participants are social work students enrolled at both Master's level at UNCC (approximately 100 students). Educational approaches proposed in this project will provide a model for effectively teaching diversity.

E. Literature Review

Challenges of Teaching Diversity.

Preparing culturally competent practitioners in an increasingly multicultural world poses great challenges for both educators and students.   First, course material on oppression, discrimination, and inequality can be difficult for students to read, hear, and/or watch, as it can

provoke strong personal reactions. Exposure to these materials forces social work students to

reexamine many of the values and beliefs they have held about themselves and those around

them. For this reason, student resistance becomes a major challenge for educators seeking to

instill diversity values, skills, and knowledge in their students who aspire to become a helping

professional.

Another impediment to social work students' diversity education and their gaining

critical self-awareness is student apprehension and fear about "saying the wrong thing" in class.

Hyde and Ruth (2002) who assessed whether students self-censor in class in order to appear

"politically correct" found that students felt uncomfortable and perceived others to be

uncomfortable in courses dealing with issues of diversity and oppression. A focus group

revealed that some of the general factors (e.g., shyness, topic too personal, didn't want to hurt

others' feelings) were likely stand-ins for fear of saying something politically incorrect. While

not unusual or unexpected, since conversations about diversity issues are generally taboo in

society, students cannot gain the necessary self-awareness without taking a risk by sharing their

thoughts and engaging in open and inclusive dialogue (Holden, Meenaaghan, Anastas, & Metrey,

2002).

Use of Instructional Technology in Multicultural Education.

Such challenges call upon innovative approaches in pedagogy of social justice to provide

a stimulating learning environment in which each student can feel safe discussing sensitive

topics. Advances in technology in higher education can reshape how multicultural courses are

taught and managed, as well as students' roles in this process. To illustrate, instructional

technology has enabled students to become more active learners, by providing them with more

opportunities and spaces to directly engage with course material, the educator, and each other (Lee et al., 2010; Schoech, 2000).

Multicultural education at professional schools has already begun to experiment using technology to engage students and promote learning processes (Hylton, 2006; MacFadden, Maiter, & Dumbrill, 2002). While these advances are exciting, allowing both instructors and students more flexibility and creativity within the learning process, it becomes necessary to explore how these forms of instructional technology influence student learning. In particular, further research should examine ways to use the instructional technology most effectively to prepare students for professional practice in the multicultural world.

F. Methods

Project Plans and Major Activities

The three major activities proposed for this project are the creation of a diversity homepage, management of online discussion forum (ODF), and facilitation of a diversity assignment (DA). The diversity course homepage will be established via Moodle, a popular course management system used in all stages of e-learning. In 2010-2011 academic year, MSW students enrolled in the required social work practice course will be encouraged to use the ODF as part of their learning experience.

ODF participants will be given a handout that explains the objectives of the ODF and the expectations and ground rules of the ODF, which is referred to as "Webtiquette." ODF participants are expected to make comments that are "meaningful, thoughtful, challenging, and honest," based on adult learning principles.   ODF participants in each class section will have a choice of methods for their online postings. For example, in the *Open Forum,* students will be free to post any message, including feedback on class discussions, questions arising from field

experiences, current events, announcements, course readings, and other materials (e.g., film clips, exercises, online resources, etc.). Students will be informed that this is an author-identified forum and their name will appear before their post. In the *Sensitive Issues Forum*, students will be instructed to post anonymously any issue they are uncomfortable bringing up in class or in the Open Forum. The forum will be closely monitored by the instructor and a teaching assistant, and the instructor will moderate the discussion and address critical comments in class.

Each student who is doing an internship will be required to complete a Diversity Assignment in the spring semester. This written assignment will begin as a discussion between the student and agency supervisor regarding issues of diversity in the field practicum agency and will progress to identify an area that is of interest to the student. The paper should be reflective in nature. Students can reflect on their feelings and reactions while working with someone of a different race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. Or they can note their observations of diversity issues at the field agency, such as population served, ethnic/racial make-up of staff, accessibility and outreach to marginalized groups, etc.

Research Design and Procedures.

Cohort A who use the educational innovations of ODF and DA as a part of their learning during this period will be designated as the experimental group, while Cohort B, without them, will be the comparison group. Since students will self-select their section, no effort will be made to match student demographic characteristics for the two conditions. The study will use a non-equivalent, quasi- experimental design to determine whether students who use the ODF and DA achieve the course objectives in terms of diversity knowledge, skills, and values more fully than students in the same course who do not use the ODF and DA as part of their class content.

Students will be required to submit their Diversity Assignment on the Moodle. In order to increase incentive for students, a Diversity Paper Award will be created in the department. The two best reflective papers will be selected by a review committee, and the recipients of the award will be acknowledged at the commencement ceremony.

G. Evaluation

A survey instrument developed for the study will ask participants to assess their achievement of the course objectives in terms of knowledge, skills, and values as well as demographic information. ODF participants will also be asked questions pertaining to their use and opinions of the ODF.

Participants will use a Likert-type Scale to assess how well the course in general, and specific learning activities in particular contributed to their development of diversity knowledge, skills, and values. The questions will be constructed from the course objectives, each of which focused on gaining diversity knowledge, skills, and values, a core component in MSW education. To illustrate, five questions on knowledge will be developed and the responses will be combined to form a *Knowledge Index*, which includes knowledge of social history, current status of ethnic minorities and oppressed groups, and the impact of various forms of oppression and inequality on the experiences of both oppressed groups and people with privilege. Similarly, five skills questions and four value questions will be developed and responses be combined form a *Skills Index*, and a *Value Index*, respectively. The reliability of each index will be tested by subjecting items to internal consistency analysis using Chronbach's alpha.

The survey instrument will also assess the impact of students' learning activities on four dimensions of student relationships, including two measures of interaction, and three related to problem solving/understanding (Lee & Bertera, 2007). Four additional items will assess

students' perceptions of how technology can facilitate or inhibit learning. Finally, participants will be asked to rate the helpfulness of using the ODF.

The researcher will also examine the effectiveness of students' multicultural education and field experiences by analyzing content of Diversity Assignment. Each paper will include student's observations and reflection on diversity-related issues in the field placement. Applying the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the major emerging themes will be analyzed. Applying the Stages of Learning model developed by Holtz Deal and Hyde (2004), students' level of self awareness will be assessed.

H. Knowledge Dissemination

Findings of the evaluation will be presented at the Council of Social Work Education annual program meetings. The model and evaluation tools developed by this project will be applicable to other disciplines emphasizing multicultural education and cultural competency such as Counseling, Psychology, Nursing, Public Health Science, Gender Studies, Gerontology, and Education. The applicant will share the results in a public forum, including a presentation during UNC Charlotte's Teaching Week. Manuscripts based on the findings will be submitted to the *Journal of Social Work Education*.

I. Human Subjects

The applicant is in the process of submitting the Human Subjects Protocol Form. Before the survey is administered, the general purpose of the study will be explained. Students will be informed that participation is voluntary and their responses will not affect their grade for the course. Additionally, they will be informed that the surveys will be completely confidential.

The results of the analyses will be reported in aggregate form, eliminating or disguising information that could reveal the identity of individual students. Confidentiality of participants

will also be maintained by linking names with random ID numbers. The list indicating ID numbers will be stored separately from the names that link to the ID numbers. To the best of our knowledge, there are no potential research risks to subjects who participate in the research. The findings of this study will provide valuable information for social work educators and practitioners in terms of improving multicultural education.

J. Extramural Funding

In order to strengthen multicultural educational curriculum, I have been collaborating with social work educators in other universities, including the University of Southern California, Howard University, and Boston College. In order to design a multisite evaluation based on our pilot studies, we will seek external funding opportunities.

K. Timeline

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Creation of diversity homepage	▓	▓											
Management of ODF		▓	▓	▓				▓	▓	▓	▓		
Diversity Assignment		▓	▓	▓				▓	▓	▓			
Outcome evaluation						▓	▓					▓	▓
Manuscript preparation								▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓

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