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The Implementation of a Sustainable Social Work Exchange Program: The University of Georgia and the University of Veracruz

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Although many universities have had international programs over the years, the 1990s may have become the decade of internationalization in American higher education with increasing numbers of foreign students studying at U.S. institutions and similar increases in numbers of U.S. students studying abroad (Desruisseaux, 1999). As colleges and universities develop ties with institutions in other countries and seek greater internationalization, traditional academic courses have been enriched to include materials based on other cultures. Academic staff and students alike have increased their contacts with counterparts from other regions of the world. These developments point toward the vitality of traditional exchange programs despite both the economic crises in Asia and Latin America and the reevaluation of support for international funding by governments and foundations following the demise of the Cold War (Desruisseaux, 2000).

Although there may be many motivations for developing an international program, including common interests in research and economic development, a long-term trend supporting the growth of an international outlook in the United States is the increasing ethnic diversity of the American population. College enrollments mirror this ethnic diversity, creating two major impacts: 1) More students are interested in courses that address issues affecting other countries because of their own heritage; and 2) An increasing percentage of American college students have become acquainted with persons from abroad and have interest in courses that assume a global perspective (El-Khawas, 1994).

Typically, international activities of most American colleges and universities have operated

with very modest budgets. Many study-abroad programs must be self-supporting through fees paid by students to cover the institutions' actual costs in organizing and administering the program. Many collaborative projects between U. S. institutions and universities in other countries have depended on grants from philanthropic foundations, governmental programs, or international organizations for most of their support (El-Khawas, 1994).

The American experience can be described in terms of three distinctively different mechanisms by which a university can internationalize its activities:

1. Mobility: encouraging an international flow of students and faculty.
2. Curriculum: integrating international subjects and concerns into academic programs and courses.
3. Projects: sponsoring collaborative projects that involve persons from one's native country with persons from other countries.

The main programs encouraging mobility have included: study abroad; student experiences in another country (ranging from one month's duration to a year's duration) that sometimes involve academic course work, but more often focus on acquiring language proficiency and a general knowledge of the host country; and faculty exchanges, covering various situations in which an American professor spends an academic term at a foreign university, often with a reciprocal visit by a foreign professor to the American campus (El-Khawas, 1994).

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Internationalizing the curriculum has been approached using two common methods: speciality approaches, in which campuses offer specialized programs of study focusing on other parts of the world, and generalist approaches, in which subject material about other parts of the world is integrated into the regular courses and academic programs. The speciality approach has a long history in American higher education and, at many larger universities, students have been able to complete degree programs that focus on certain countries or regions of the world, such as Latin America. The generalist approach has been much less common (El-Khawas, 1994).

Collaborative projects with foreign universities represent another type of international activity for American colleges and universities. Projects may include a wide variety of programs, in which a college develops ties with a university abroad to carry out specific tasks that may include collaborative research, specialized academic programs that draw on each country's strengths, or curriculum revision projects, as well as joint development of new institutes (Mathews, 1997).

Developments in schools of social work in the United States have followed those of higher education in general, except that social work education has been slower than some other disciplines to move into the international arena for a variety of reasons. Although there were many international social work initiatives after World War II, interest and support declined dramatically in the sixties, probably due to the intense attention the profession gave to domestic issues such as the Civil Rights Movement, urban unrest, and the War on Poverty. The attitude that there were more than enough problems at home became a rationale for doing less in the international arena. Even with increases in international programming in social work education in the 1990s, the level of activity has still not recovered to the levels before 1967 (Healy, 1999). However, an important value in social work practice has always been sensitivity to and knowl-

edge about cultural differences both within the United States and in the world. These issues are discussed in the literature under the topics of cross-cultural, multicultural, and international social work education (Holmes, & Mathews, 1993) and provide a natural starting point for social work involvement in international activities.

Fortunately, the last two decades have seen a considerable increase in interest in international issues within U.S. social work education (Asamoah, Healy, & Mayadas, 1997). Global interdependence has created important avenues for international involvement by reshaping the social work environment in the following ways: (a) international issues and events, especially movements of populations, have changed U.S. domestic practice and demand new knowledge and competencies; (b) social problems are commonly shared by developed and developing countries to an unprecedented degree; (c) the political, economic, and social actions of one country directly and indirectly affect other countries' social and economic well-being; and (d) new opportunities for international sharing and exchange are made possible by extraordinary technological developments, such as the Internet (Asamoah, Healy, & Mayadas, 1997).

Efforts to internationalize programs of social work education have included: (a) initiating special courses on international social work; (b) integrating international content into other courses in the curriculum; (c) offering field placements abroad; (d) enrolling students from other countries; (e) utilizing faculty members from other nations; and (f) sending American students/practitioners/educators to other countries for educational experiences (Johnson, 1996).

The international exchange program described in this study arose from forces supporting internationalization in both U.S. and Mexican universities and, in particular, from the commitment of social work educators at the U.S. and the Mexican professional social work schools to broaden the preparation and experiences of their students,

faculty, and graduates. This program utilized all of the elements described by Johnson (1996) and was created in response to the forces of global interdependence described by Asamoah, Healy, & Mayadas (1997). It also occurred within the context of institutional internationalization efforts at both partner institutions, beginning with a commitment of both university systems at the highest administrative levels, illustrating a stable and sustained progression of activities, which conformed to models for internationalization supported by scholars in the field (Gacel-Avila, 1999).

The Development and Growth of the Relationship Between the Partner Institutions

Both the University of Georgia (UGA) and the University of Veracruz (UV) have had numerous official agreements with universities in other countries. Most of these agreements amounted to little more than a signing ceremony. In fact, there had been a previous agreement between the two universities which had resulted in very little activity because no individual colleges or departments had become involved. The following summary presents some of the multiple factors which account for the fact that the two universities developed a vital exchange program during the 1990s.

Motivations for the Initiation of the Exchange Program

In the decade of the 1990s, UGA began to define itself as an institution of national and international significance, partly due to the influence of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta when international attention was focused on the state. During this same time period, the state of Georgia was becoming a center for the resettlement of refugees due to the presence of the international offices of CARE and the Carter Center, among other agencies concerned with international affairs. Meanwhile, Georgia was becoming a destination for immigrant workers, primarily from Mexico, because of the rapid economic development of the state. It is

estimated that the Latino population of the state grew from about 100,000 in 1990 to over 500,000 in 1998 (Akioka, 1998). The great majority of these persons were recently-arrived Mexicans. Thus, there were many forces supporting greater internationalization at the University of Georgia.

On the other hand, UV aspired to become a premier institution among public universities in Mexico and was located in the state of Veracruz with rooted interests in international business and commerce. The production and exportation of coffee, and the presence of major oil deposits and petrochemical industries in the state, have historically promoted international relationships. In addition, the Port of Veracruz was a major export-import center for the nation of Mexico. Thus, the government of the state of Veracruz became very supportive of internationalization efforts. UV was also fortunate to have within its structure the Escuela para Estudiantes Extranjeros (EEE), an excellent language school that has been hosting foreign students and a variety of programs for U.S. and European universities for almost 50 years. The convergence of interests between UV and UGA and their respective states provided significant commonalities for the initiation of an ongoing exchange program, although major barriers did exist.

Institutional and Cultural Factors in Developing the Relationship

Similarities between the partner institutions.

Both institutions were cognizant of the economic imperatives for the economy of their respective states after the passage of NAFTA. Both institutions felt a strong need to promote bilingualism among their faculty and students in preparation for the new, single North American economy. As large public systems with a major mission for public service and outreach, these institutions also served large and diverse geographic regions. For example, both states have three major sub-regions: coastal plains, piedmont (sierra), and mountains which necessitate different approaches to outreach

and extension activities. These institutions both serve states with abundant natural resources and large agricultural and agribusiness sectors. There was also a remarkable congruence between the two institutions in the academic programs offered. On the cultural level, both institutions represented states with strong regional identities and with a history of formality and respect for tradition. However, there were also significant differences which sometimes presented challenges to smooth interchanges between UGA and UV.

Differences Between the Partner Institutions.

Potential barriers included a major disparity of economic resources between the partner universities. UGA had benefitted from major increases in funding over the past decade, which can be attributed to the efforts of a supportive governor and legislature, which had resources to invest in the higher education system due to a sustained economic boom in the state. On the other hand, UV had experienced some very lean years due to the Mexican economic crisis of the 1990s and the decline of oil production due to a worldwide glut. Other significant differences included the fact that most of the UGA faculty possessed doctoral degrees from institutions across the nation, while UV faculty were mostly graduates of UV with few having degrees beyond the master's level.

Additionally, the curricular structure of UGA was much more open and flexible than UV. In the UGA professional schools, including social work, the level of professional practice was much higher than at UV. For example, the terminal degree for social work in Georgia is the Master of Social Work, while the terminal degree at UV is a bachelor's degree. The state of Georgia also has a licensure law for clinical social workers and a strong professional association. The profession in Veracruz lacks even a state-wide professional organization. The organizational processes, administrative structures, and the academic culture of UGA were also more open and informal than those of UV, which tended to be rather hierarchical and

formal. Finally, UGA, as the oldest land grant university in the U.S. with over 200 years of history behind it, was much more institutionally evolved than UV, which is still a relatively young state university, founded about 50 years ago.

Stages of Development for the Exchange Program

Building on the strengths of each institution, the exchange program evolved through the stages of development typical of such programs (See Gacel-Avila, 1999). The various phases are described in the following paragraphs.

Phase One

Many conversations, mutual visits, and the working out of an exchange agreement took place in the initial phase, 1990–1993. Some serendipitous events helped the process along. For example, a social worker and former diplomat, who had worked as a consultant with the national Department of Human Services in Mexico City, had returned to his home in Atlanta to retire and was serving on the University Foundation Board of UV. During meetings with the UV administration, a discussion of the need for a partner university in the U.S. surfaced. The retired diplomat suggested that UV not look at an Ivy League institution, but consider a public land grant institution with a similar mission and parallel disciplines. At his suggestion, contact was made with UGA whose vice-president for Public Service and Outreach had a particular interest in Latin America due to his previous career in representing agribusinesses in the Latin American region (David Amato, personal communication, May 15, 1999). Both the retired diplomat and the UGA Vice President for Public Service and Outreach have maintained contact and served as consultants to the exchange program from the beginning stages until the present (Eugene Younts, personal communication, December 17, 1999). The presence of these two committed individuals, who maintained warm personal relationships with key persons in both partner institutions, added an important cultural element

consistent with the Mexican value on personal relationships or *personalismo*, which is key to any cross-cultural endeavor with Latino persons (Lum, 1996).

Phase Two

The primary activities in the second phase of the exchange program, 1994–1995, were the identification of academic partners in each institution and working out discipline-specific agreements. It was during this phase that the UGA School of Social Work began relationships with the two social work campuses of UV, one in the northern region at Poza Rica, Veracruz, and one in the southern region at Minatitlán, Veracruz.

Phase Three

Identification of both human resources and financial support occupied the third phase of the exchange program, 1995–1996. At UGA, a cadre of three faculty members in social work committed themselves to working together with the Dean of the UGA School of Social Work to garner support for the exchange efforts. At UV, the deans of both social work programs and their administrative chief, the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) (Director del Area de Humanidades), committed themselves to submitting formal invitations for visits and to host the initial visits from UGA by covering the costs of the initial group. While in the state of Veracruz, the team made a significant commitment and would visit the main campus in Jalapa and the two regional campuses, five and seven hours from Jalapa, over a period of several weeks. The expenses of the exchange activities were paid by the university administrators out of regular operating budgets.

Phase Four

Implementation of a range of exchange activities by the partner schools of social work took place during phase four, 1996–1998. During this phase, the UGA social work exchange team of three faculty members applied for and won three competitive internal grants from the VPAA of UGA totaling more than \$25,000 over three years, which

paid for the UGA portion of the activities during these years and represented a high-level of institutional commitment to the exchange program. The UV VPAA continued to support the exchange by paying expenses for specific invited visits, such as a lecture series and curriculum consultations at both social work campuses.

Phase Five

Expansion of the exchange program to include other disciplines at both UGA and UV occurred over a period of several years, 1997–1999. During this time, several other disciplines at UGA organized student/faculty exchanges with partner disciplines at UV. The two most common activities were taking a UGA class to the EEE of UV for intensive cultural and language instruction and exchanging visits between UGA and UV faculty in partner disciplines. The student classes were self-financed through student participant fees, while the faculty visits were financed by departmental funds or small faculty grants for international activities from the UGA VPAA. The range of disciplines involved in the exchange expanded to include elementary education, secondary education, and early childhood education in the College of Education; child development, housing, and textiles in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences; and several departments of the College of Agriculture, the College of Veterinary Science, and some ancillary services, such as landscape management and auxiliary business management.

In 1998, the UGA School of Social Work, the College of Education, and the Office of International Development of UGA, in partnership with the UV Area of Humanidades, received a \$98,000 grant from the USAID (Association Liaison Office) for two years of funding for the exchange activities. These activities ranged from cultural immersion classes at the EEE to continuing education seminars and semester faculty visits at both universities in the two disciplines. All of these activities were based on the original exchange model worked out by the UGA School of Social

Work in partnership with the UV Schools of Social Work, as described in the following sections. At this point, coordination of the overall exchange moved to the UGA Office of International Development, with continued support from social work faculty members.

Elements of the UGA-UV Model

Although the implementation of the overall exchange had many aspects that could serve as models for other programs, the actual activities were based on a number of elements which are of great relevance to social work education and could be replicated in many settings and in many institutional arrangements. The utilization of cultural immersion as a means of teaching language and cultural awareness has a long tradition in other disciplines and is still widely considered the best way to teach language and cultural content (Terehoff, 2000; Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999). However, it is the combination of cultural immersion with a range of other activities that utilize the overall model, which holds great potential for utilization by other programs in the field of social work education.

Cultural Immersion Combined with Social Work Continuing Education

The first experience was piloted in 1995 with a small group of faculty members and graduate students (See Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999). Since that time, the model has been refined into a standard format including following elements.

Preparation

Preparation for the experience has both a logistical and an educational component. About a year before the intensive ten-day seminar is scheduled to take place, usually in the month of May, the program coordinator develops a brochure for dissemination at state-wide and national professional meetings and prepares paid advertisements for the publications of the professional social work

organizations in the state of Georgia to be released in October. The brochure gives the dates of the seminar, a brief description of the cultural immersion and professional education experience, registration costs and time lines, and explains how the 35 hours of continuing education credit will be distributed among core and related hours, including ethics. Although the brochure is targeted toward practicing social workers at the master's level, it is also used to recruit current MSW students who may choose to take the seminar as partial fulfillment of a three-hour intensive May semester course when combined with additional pre- and post-sessions, an academic paper, and a service-learning project on return to Georgia. Deposits for confirmation of participation are required at least two months before the scheduled seminar. The outreach to the professional community was a response to the fact that many faculty members and licensed social workers needed both the cultural competence training and the continuing education units, and the fact that the practice community was becoming increasingly aware of the need for specific training for work with the burgeoning Latino client population.

After the group, which typically includes five practitioners, three faculty members from UGA or other public social work programs, and five master's-level social work students, has formed, three pre-travel sessions are scheduled to deal with the logistics of international travel and to prepare the group for the cultural immersion experience (See Boyle & Barranti, 1999, for a complete description of the continuing education model). These sessions are usually held in different parts of the state to accommodate practitioners who live in different regions. Depending on the geographic spread of the participants, video conferences and the Internet may be used. The contents of the sessions include health issues, concepts of cultural immersion, and group formation.

During the same time period, the EEE is in charge of planning the cultural immersion experience through the Division of Special Programs.

Preparation at the EEE includes developing an orientation packet; selecting host families according to the needs of the participants; collecting materials for teaching language and culture by utilizing social work examples in grammatical lessons and social work issues for the practice readings; setting up visits to social agencies; and inviting speakers familiar with social work to share expertise related to ethnicity and social class, women's issues, political and social reform movements, and other topics identified in communication with the UGA group coordinator.

Implementation of the Onsite Program

Upon arrival at the EEE in Jalapa, Veracruz, the EEE staff provide an orientation session to the home stay experience and give each participant an orientation packet with maps, home stay guidelines, emergency numbers, the daily schedule of classes, visits, and seminars, and other relevant details. After this session, the participants meet their host families and spend the remainder of the first day with the families and begin their regular schedule the next morning. A typical day begins with breakfast around 7:30 A.M., morning language class at 9:00, an agency visit around 11:00, return to the host family for *comida* (the large meal of the day) around 2:00 P.M., siesta around 3:30 P.M., return to the language school for a seminar by a UGA faculty member around 6:00, and home for the light evening meal around 8:00 in the evening.

Evaluation

A final integrative session is held before departure from Jalapa by the UGA group coordinator, usually occurring on the same evening as the farewell fiesta is given by the EEE. About a month after the end of the program, the group gathers for a two-hour seminar at a Mexican restaurant in a central location in the state to share photographs and memories. Those who participated for continuing education credit receive their certificates, and any remaining group business is finished. In recent years, a cultural competence pretest has been given in the first orientation session and the post-test has been given in the final group session in Georgia

(Sabin & Boyle, in submission) along with continuing education evaluation forms used by UGA.

Preliminary analyses of cultural competence gains indicate that this continuing education experience is highly effective in increasing participants' levels of cultural competence, while summative data on the continuing education evaluation forms indicate that the program is rated among the best offered by the school.

Undergraduate Professional Education and Cultural Immersion

This learning module contains most of the aspects of the continuing education seminar described above, where the only difference is based on one of the regional campuses of UV, many hours from the EEE in Jalapa.

Preparation

The logistical aspects of preparation and orientation are similar to the continuing education seminar with the difference that only undergraduate social work students are recruited for this for-credit class, which has its own syllabus and fits as an elective in the undergraduate program of study. The pre-travel orientation sessions also involve cultural competence pretests. In addition, there are three days of intensive cultural training just before departure, utilizing campus-based experts in social work with Latino clients, Mexican culture and history, social development as a practice theory, and preparation for possible culture shock. These on-campus training days attempt to make up for the fact that the resources of the EEE are not available in the regional campuses where the students will experience their cultural immersion. Faculty members of the regional campuses where the social work programs are based recruit host families and prepare a schedule of activities.

Implementation of the Onsite Program

Typical activities include the assignment of a student buddy who will accompany the UGA student throughout the eight-day stay; attending regular social work classes taught completely in Spanish;

participating in field experiences with the assigned buddy; and a daily integrative seminar with the UGA faculty member serving as the group leader.

Evaluation

On return to the UGA campus, at least three days are devoted to integrative activities. Students hand in their daily journal which they have kept throughout the immersion experience; spend significant time in debriefing and cultural re-entry exercises; participate in lectures and view videotapes about the Latino population in Georgia; attempt to apply their learning from the immersion experience to social work in Georgia; develop an outline for an academic paper to be finished at a later date; prepare a scrapbook of photographs taken during the travel portion of the class; prepare a class presentation to share with a social work class; and take the culture-specific Mexican Cultural Competency Scale (Sabin & Boyle, in submission) post-test.

MSW Field Practicum Experiences

After several years of experience with the classes described above, the UV School of Social Work in Minatitlán requested that students be sent for their concentration practicum experience. At the time, there was only one master's-level social worker on that faculty. After looking into the logistics and the literature on international field placements in social work and finding many positive values (Lyons & Ramanathan, 1999), the UGA faculty decided to offer the experience.

Preparation

The Office of Field Instruction at UGA's School of Social Work offered training to the one eligible faculty member at UV Minatitlán during the visit of a UGA faculty member with an undergraduate class described above. The international field experience was listed in the inventory of possible practicum sites. Students who were interested were referred to sources of financial aid for international study. Students who chose the practicum worked with their academic advisors to develop an alter-

nate plan of study, which would allow them to take some required courses via distance technology.

All applicants were required to participate in the Jalapa UGA/EEE Continuing Education Seminar during the summer previous to the international practicum experience in order to become familiar with the state of Veracruz and the social work profession in Mexico. UV social work faculty arranged housing with a host family and prepared possible practicum sites.

Implementation of the Onsite Program

A bilingual UGA social work faculty liaison traveled with the students to Minatitlán and stayed for several days of orientation and planning with the UV instructors. The students were matched with a buddy in the social work program and observed some regular classes. However, since the UV program is an undergraduate program, the MSW students spent much time with the faculty, even offering English classes as a gesture of appreciation. Since students were in their practicum five days per week in a block practicum for one semester, they divided their time between a social development project, a community outreach project in a marginal colonia, and within an agency setting that served as a home for street children. They were placed with a team of UV students in the marginal community, but were the only students working in the home for street children.

Evaluation

At the end of the semester, the UGA faculty liaison returned to UV to evaluate the practicum with the field instructor and students on the specified objectives for the concentration practicum and to give a grade. During the practicum, the students had kept a daily log of learning experiences which they sent via e-mail to the faculty liaison, and had completed other regular assignments such as a psychosocial study of a client, a process recording, an agency study, and an exit exam project (choosing a problem area involving a client with which they could do an intervention, completing a literature review on the problem area and intervention,

and completing pre- and post-measures with the individual client, group, or community). The editing and final draft of the exit project was allowed to carry over into the next semester, although the majority of the work was done in Veracruz. Additionally, the students completed the school-wide evaluation form for concentration practicum sites. They all rated their international practicum experience as the highlight of their MSW program. Most of the students found immediate employment working with the Latino population in Georgia.

Joint Research and Publication

As a result of sustained professional relationships between UGA and UV faculty members, three co-authored refereed articles have been published in a U.S. social work journal, and two articles have been jointly published by social work programs at a U.S. and a Mexican university in a bilingual journal. Topics have ranged from the evaluation of a social development program in a rural village to a case study of an intervention with street children. Several other joint articles are in preparation. Additionally, two of the participants in the continuing education group later returned to Veracruz to do dissertation research which should be published soon, utilizing contacts made as continuing education students in the EEE in Jalapa. These doctoral students' experiences doing dissertation research have established the pattern for other UGA doctoral students who have the language skills to do dissertation research in Veracruz. It is expected that some faculty members from UV will enroll in the UGA MSW and social work PhD programs in the near future and that they will generate publishable research both on the Latino population in Georgia and on social work issues in Veracruz.

Development of Social Work Continuing Education in Veracruz

At the beginning of the exchange process, there was no formal continuing education available for social work professionals in the state of Veracruz. During the second year of the UGA continuing education program described above, a one-day joint seminar with participants from both partner institutions was held on a topic of mutual interest. A small group of faculty from both UV schools traveled to Jalapa for the day. It was such a success that it became an annual offering via distance learning video conference among three campuses of UV so that larger numbers of social work faculty and practitioners from the regional campuses could participate.

In addition, as part of the USAID grant, a series of interactive video conferences were offered from UGA to UV on the requested topic of substance abuse in the summer and fall of 2000. The series culminated in a three-day visit to each UV social work campus by the presenter, a UGA professor, who is a national authority in the area of treating addictions, a high-demand area in Veracruz. This series was used to demonstrate the logistics of a formal continuing education program with pre-registration, a participation fee, continuing education units, and a certificate of participation as a way of introducing the concept of a self-sustaining professional education program for UV social work programs. It is hoped that a series of distance continuing education seminars offered in both directions will evolve from this pilot offering.

Internationalization of the Curriculum

Through the process of formal and informal visits to each school of social work by key faculty members of the two institutions, the partner schools of social work have engaged in a process of consultation toward enhanced curriculum content, both at the levels of theory and of practical course content. At the beginning of the exchange program, the UV schools relied totally on social development theory applied to the community level. Early in the

exchange process in 1994–95, they requested that workshops and curriculum consultation be provided toward enriching their curriculum offerings with individual and family-oriented theories and methods. Likewise, during the initial stages of the exchange program, the UGA social work program was entirely oriented around a direct practice/clinical model. Over the course of the exchange as UGA faculty and students were exposed to the social development model of UV, a great deal of interest was created in expanding the UGA program to offer community specialization. Thus, in 1998, UGA implemented a new MSW curriculum with a new area of concentration called Community Empowerment and Program Development. This new concentration offering clearly demonstrated the impact of four years of interaction with the UV faculty and their theory base. Similarly, in 1999, the UV social work programs implemented a new and flexible curriculum, with content concentration in individual case work and family systems, in addition to their previous community orientation.

Both partner social work programs have developed new program objectives which include a global perspective and the integration of objectives for internationalization throughout their curriculum. UV social work has added a two-year English requirement to the social work program and UGA undergraduate social work has made Spanish the recommended language to meet the foreign language requirement for entrance into the social work major. In addition, the presence of partner students and faculty on campus and in classes at both institutions has become a routine part of the life of the schools, so that almost every class is impacted by the concerns of persons from the partner schools with varying cultural perspectives. By the 2000 academic year, over 40% of the UGA social work faculty had participated in some aspect of the exchange program, involving travel to Veracruz, and all key leaders of the social work programs at UV had spent time on the UGA campus. A cadre of social work

practitioners with cultural immersion experiences are forming among those practitioners who have participated in the continuing education offerings in Veracruz. Thus, UGA is beginning to meet the critical need for culturally competent social workers to work with the resident Mexican-heritage population of the state.

Discussion of the Model

A number of the model's strengths have emerged over the years. The existence of an infrastructure supporting international activities at the university level has been a great asset to UGA. The existence of a first-class language school and the EEE, with its innovative leaders, has been a great asset to UV. The presence of bilingual persons in key positions has been crucial in building and sustaining relationships to counteract the general lack of bilingual language skills in both the UGA and UV social work programs. The commitment on all levels at both partner institutions, from the presidents' offices to teaching faculty, has enabled the exchange program to thrive without any single large source of financial support. For example, both schools have been willing to do without some of their faculty members, and colleagues have pitched in to cover their duties during visits to the partner social work program. There has been no grant to buy out or replace faculty time during these visits.

Clear objectives for the specific activities of the exchange program have enabled both partners to contribute their strengths on an equal footing. For example, UGA's individual gains from the expertise of UV visiting faculty in assisting UGA faculty and students in understanding the Mexican immigrant population and their culture has been of equal value to any sharing of expertise by UGA faculty with UV faculty and students. Finally, a flexible, generous, and creative approach to all activities has sustained the exchange program through many stresses and strains, which might have caused less committed parties to give up on the joint venture.

As in any international endeavor, experience has revealed several areas for improvement. The lack of stable financial support is of primary concern. At times, UGA faculty members have used their professional development funds to support their travel to Veracruz for consultation or group leadership activities, thus sacrificing their attendance at professional conferences in the U.S. A second major issue has involved the overall coordination of activities after additional disciplines became involved. There have been many new actors on the scene who did not know the established protocols, which occasionally caused consternation for the senior participants who thought they had clear understandings. There has been a continual effort to centralize a liaison function for the entire exchange process with a single contact point in each partner institution, but it has been a constant struggle to get new participants oriented to the established protocol. Maintaining clear channels of communication both within and between institutions remains a challenge. Additionally, both universities, excluding the EEE, have a severe lack of bilingual persons, which means that a few persons carry the total responsibility for communication much of the time. As the years of active exchange experiences increase, the language problem is gradually being resolved through aggressive language study by faculty at both universities and targeted recruitment of bilingual MSW and doctoral students at UGA.

Lessons Learned

It is clear from the UGA/UV partnership experience that a formal agreement is not sufficient to implement a successful exchange program. Such an agreement had in fact been in the files for over ten years before a coincidence of factors, including commitment by a few key individuals, revitalized the relationship and led to a new agreement and an active exchange program. It is also commonly thought that financial support is the key factor in growing an exchange program. However, the experience derived from this program demonstrates that it

is possible to cobble together funds from many different sources when there is commitment to continue the program. The example of this exchange also supports the notion that it is possible to initiate a program in stages, gradually adding various activities as different sources of support are found. For example, the stability of the continuing education seminar and its success have provided a platform from which a variety of other activities can proceed. Thus, the success of one component of the program should be seen as a stage toward reaching more global goals, rather than as an end in itself.

Relative to human resources, the UGA/UV program was blessed with the stability of key persons over many years. For example, two of the key players on each side, the VPAA of UV and the Vice President of Public Service and Outreach of UGA, both founding members of the exchange, survived a change of presidents at both institutions and remained active in the exchange. They were able to successfully orient and involve the new executives, a crucial transition for continuity. Similar to the program's expansion to include new disciplines, it was critical to share the previous vision with the leaders from each school in order to maintain consistency in goals and activities.

Finally, for the exchange program to contribute optimally to the process of internationalization, it was important for both institutions to maintain a broad vision, which viewed the development of an international perspective in all sectors of the university (administration, teaching, research, and service) as the overall goal, rather than being limited to isolated activities, even if they were quite successful.

Recommendations

The following recommendations rise from the UGA/UV experience, and may provide valuable insights for other social work programs seeking to establish a sustainable exchange program. 1) In choosing a partner institution, a congruence of disciplines and missions is crucial. 2) For optimal implementation and continued functioning, it is

highly desirable that both institutions have a parallel structure of international offices at the university level. These offices can most effectively carry out the overall coordination of exchange programs, facilitating the participation of relevant faculties. In the UGA/UV exchange, it was the social work programs which sometimes bore the burden of coordinating the entire project without the resources of a university-wide function. 3) Ideally, a single person should serve as the overall coordinator of an exchange program and should be given sufficient time to carry out that function. 4) All persons who become involved in an exchange program should be given the time and resources to study the relevant language intensively at the beginning of their involvement. 5) Funding for student mobility and faculty exchanges should be made a part of each individual academic unit's budget to assure that the process of internationalization is integrated into the life of the academic unit. 6) Social work programs should establish income-generating activities in the exchange to ensure that the exchange program survives. 7) Finally, social work programs should include

continuing professional education as a core element of an exchange program to offer practicing professionals the opportunity to upgrade their own skills and to contribute to the internationalization of the university and the profession.

Conclusion

Over a period of eight years, the social work programs of two public universities in different countries with very different cultures found sufficient commonality in professional values to overcome theoretical, cultural, and resource barriers. They were able to establish and maintain a meaningful and productive exchange program which significantly enriched both partners and enhanced their concepts of social work theory and practice. In the exchange process, it became clear that shared commitments to positive social change could lead to common understanding and productive communication. Thus, professional social work education successfully united continuing education with formal academic professional education, outreach, public service, and research in an international context.

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