

Preparing Emerging Social Work Professionals for Competent Practice in American Indian Country

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From matriculation to graduation, Kathryn M. Buder Center scholars and SAGE (Social Workers Advancing through Grounded Education) graduate-level students are focused on developing transferable skills and knowledge that, when applied, will transform the quality of services for families and communities in American Indian country. The goal of SAGE is to train master-level social work students to become “culturally-competent mental and behavioral health providers in American Indian/Alaska Native communities in their work with at-risk children, adolescents and transitional-age youth.” Critical to ensuring the realization of those goals for our students is the collaboration between the Buder Center and the Office of Field Education & Community Partnerships (OFE&CP). This collaboration has resulted in the identification and commitment of social service organizations in 14 agencies. These organizations, with the support of their professional staff, work to advance social work practice and their mission, by allowing our students to learn under the supervision of seasoned professionals in mental/behavioral health.

Employing a student-centered approach, both departments within the Brown School are responsible for supporting student learning goals through field experiences. The OFE&CP coordinates the affiliation of practicum sites, provides assistance to students seeking to commit to a practicum experience through a guided selection process and monitors student progress once in practicum. The Buder Center is responsible for ensuring the practicum focus, location, population served, course preparation (including cultural competence) for practice and financial support of Native and non-Native students committed to working in Indian Country. Undergirding the field experience is the requirement that, prior to students entering the field, they must take courses from the American

Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) concentration and Mental Health or the Violence Prevention/Intervention tracks.

Staff in both departments work in concert with students, to promote personal and professional growth and competency. This is accomplished through: 1) field advisement and 2) faculty support. The field advisement in OFE&CP supports the student and field instructor (supervisor) to ensure that the student meets or exceeds expectations of all required competencies. Faculty support is provided by the AI/AN concentration and includes, 1) provision of an inter-professional /interdisciplinary syllabi, 2) cultivated AI/AN professional alumni relationships as a resource for practicum sites and 3) faculty coaching and mentoring for the professional development of students. The effectiveness of the support and preparation students receive from these resources has been evident in the site visits that were completed for SAGE scholars in the summer of 2015.

Within their respective agencies, students assumed leadership in various tasks and roles assigned to them. The experiences ranged from clinical work with individual caseloads to policy research, development, implementation and dissemination. Other tasks included researching, developing, writing grants, collaborating with other organizations, providing intensive case management, developing briefing papers on topics connected to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid eligibility of Children and Youth in Tribal Foster Care. The field instructors have been impressed with the students’ analytical abilities, as well as their ability to build rapport with the clients and staff of the respective agencies.



Rachel John

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To be completely honest, I was afraid that I would apply to college and no one would want me. I knew I had good grades and I felt prepared, but what if I wasn't? What if college was only a childish dream for Indian children? My biggest fear was disappointing my mother. She had sacrificed so much for me and I could not let her down. Senior year arrived and I began the college application process. I applied to fifteen schools because I figured my chances would be better. I saved Duke University for last, because I needed more time to flirt with my dream before submitting the official attempt to make it my reality. I applied for as many scholarships as I could, because I knew that getting into college was the easy part and, for me, the hard part was going to be funding my education. Finally, it was spring and letters started coming in. Every day after school, I would check the mail with my mom. I was accepted into fourteen schools and received eight scholarships. With all of my scholarships in place, I had the luxury of selecting any of the fourteen schools to attend because, for the first time in my life, money was not going to be the deciding factor. I am grateful to these organizations, for supporting me on my educational journey: Oljato Chapter Scholarship, Gates Millennium Scholarship, Chief Manuelito Scholarship, American Indian Services, American Indian Education Foundation, Suns Charities Scholarship, All Native American High School Academic Team and the Northern Arizona Native American Foundation.

In the fall, my mother flew with me to North Carolina for orientation week. It was my dream come true. I elected to attend Duke University and live my dream of being a Blue Devil. The best part of my introduction to Duke was having my mother there with me. I now had a key to a dorm at my dream school all because she could never tell her little girl no. Looking back now, after completing my freshmen year of college, I can't convey how thankful I am for all the people who have given me chances and did not judge me by the color of my skin or from where I come. I admire the educators who continue to help the Navajo children learn to dream and provide the support needed to believe in themselves. Returning home, to the little house encompassed by monuments and red sand, always gives me a unique perspective. So, when I am at school stuck in the rain, I feel proud of the journey I have taken that led me from the dirt roads of Monument Valley to Duke's chapel. I am proud to be joining some of the nation's smartest students, while representing my Navajo people. Even on my challenging days, when I have two exams and a paper to write, I look back on my journey and pinch myself. I am living my dream. ♦

From Matriculation to Graduation

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Continuous collaboration is essential for the sustained success of students in practice, especially in American Indian Country. It is imperative that emerging social worker professionals are equipped to be culturally competent and possess a strong grounding in professional social work skills. ♦

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issues. It wasn't until my senior year, when I took our community-based education environmental science course, that I was sure I was going down the right path. I have chosen to further my education in environmental science and get my bachelor's degree in Pre-Environmental Science. I will continue my education after this and obtain more degrees in the environmental field, hopefully getting a degree as an environmental engineer. I want to help not only my fellow humans, but all the creatures of Earth and Earth itself.

When I first heard of the Gates Millennium Scholarship, during my sophomore year, I knew I would apply for it and knew I would receive it. I am saying this in the humblest way possible. It wasn't because I was cocky or full of myself, but because I was confident in my abilities and knew all the hard work I was doing was worthy of a scholarship as honorable and exceptional as that one. I feel honored, but most of all I feel humbled. To know that others see something in me that has taken me years to recognize made my dedication and will stronger, to help make a difference in my community and around the globe. ♦



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