

Making a World of

SOCIAL WORKERS

collaborated across national boundaries long before anyone thought to call it globalization. Nineteenth century American social workers visited England and returned with the idea of settlement houses. The International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers were both established in the early twentieth century. In a report on the 2007 International Social Work Conference, Alberto Godenzi of Boston College and Kay Davidson of the University of Connecticut wrote that “the core of social work is international.” Indeed, the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) require that educational programs prepare “social workers to recognize the global context of social work practice.”



DIFFERENCE

International content in the social work curriculum, coupled with cross-border travel is helping address a plethora of societal needs around the globe

BY KAREN LEGGETT

A Glimpse from the Past

There was a great spurt of international social work activity following World War II, especially through the United Nations relief and development agencies. The more recent surge of interest in the global context of social work began in the late 1990s and is just now being reflected in an explosion of interest in overseas field placements, study tours, research initiatives, cross-border collaborations, and the infusion of international content into social work curricula at the graduate and post-graduate levels.

The National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD) of Schools of Social Work created an International Task Force to gather and disseminate information on innovative approaches to international social work and facilitate meaningful international partnerships. Many of these approaches have been presented at the International Social Work Conference, first held at Boston College in 2007 with another planned for spring 2008. Topics at the conference range from risk management to evaluation, to resource challenges, and sustaining international initiatives.

Friendships nurtured by just this type of conference are the birthplace of many, if not most, current international programs. Mark Rodgers, now dean of the Graduate School of Social Work at Dominican University in Illinois, was initially motivated by an undergraduate education abroad experience in England where he studied prison reform. He soon became involved in international social work organizations and developed connections in Latvia. By 2003 he had initiated a faculty exchange program between Monmouth University in New Jersey and the Higher School of Social Work and Social Pedagogics "Attistiba" in Riga, Latvia.

Dominican's Graduate School of Social Work prepares students for the practice of "globally focused, family-centered social work," because as Rodgers tells his students, "The families you serve in the twenty-first century will not all be like you. They come from Sudan, Kenya, Vietnam. Every language of the world is in Chicago." One student whose field placement was in a program to prevent human trafficking in Ecuador is now employed by the Illinois Attorney General's office to work on the same issue.

Nancy Williams, director of global programs at the University of Georgia, noted the influx of undocumented workers in Georgia, so "Going to countries in Latin America where students can become culturally competent helps them learn about the cultures of people they will work with in Georgia." Eileen Ihrig, director of international programs in the School of Social Work at Tulane University in New Orleans, strongly believes that all social workers must have a sense of the cultural context of their clients. "It's impossible even as a social worker in the United States to be working in any community without encountering different ethnic groups."

Loyola University in Chicago addressed this aspect of social work very directly in 2006 when it began to offer a subspecialty certificate in migration studies. A fieldwork assignment abroad to study the other side of immigration is a crucial component

of the certificate. Professor Maria Vidal de Haymes led one group of students working with Jesuit Migrant Services in the Mexican state of Vera Cruz in 2006. "We thought we had a good understanding of immigrants coming to a new country and their process of incorporation...What was revealed to us in a way that can't happen in a domestic field placement is the impact on the sending communities. We saw communities where there are only women, children, and elderly, or children who've had long separations from parents who are working in the United States....We learned to appreciate the trauma, violence, fear, and vulnerability that are part of the process of migration. We have a better sense of the complexity of immigrant families." Students came away with a more nuanced appreciation of migration. "They might ask questions during client interviews that they wouldn't have thought of before," adds de Haymes.

Similarly, a student from Monmouth University had an internship with a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Bangladesh. The NGO was trying to make it possible for children to attend school in the morning and work in the afternoon because their families needed the income. While the student was in Bangladesh, the U.S. Senate was debating legislation to ban all imports of goods made by children. "The student could see the practical impact of a policy that on the surface seemed benevolent," said Robin Mama, who chairs the Department of Social Work at Monmouth University.

At Monmouth, says Mama, "we put families in a global context. Families deal with issues wherever they are that have some similarities—domestic violence, bringing up children, poverty, addiction...Our students are not going to be working with white, middle-class folks. They will work with people who are different and have different life stories. They need to know how to access them in a way that respects their human rights." Indeed, the headline on the Monmouth Department of Social Work Web page is "Human Rights Based Social Work Education."



Tulane social work students in north India, in Dharamsala with the officers of the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA). TWA is a group of women who work on behalf of the community of Tibetan refugees in affairs related to improving conditions within families and within the larger community.



COURTESY OF AMANDA LOGE

Amanda Loge visiting a school in Peru as part of her international field work for her social work graduate program at the University of Minnesota.

Monmouth sent its first social work student overseas in 1998. The International and Community Development concentration fuses concepts of traditional community organizing, development, and human rights. “We focus on community development and planning,” explains Mama, “so that students could work in the community as an organizer, as a policy person in the United States, or transfer those skills in development to the international arena.” Paul Longo, director of field placements, says Monmouth’s master’s in social work (M.S.W.) program is attracting students who come from undergraduate programs in peace studies, international relations, and political science as well as social work.

The International Menu

There is a varied menu of international opportunities available to students and faculty, ranging from summer and semester courses abroad, internships, service learning/volunteer opportunities, and field placements. Loyola University Chicago offers graduate social

work classes each summer at its center in Rome. Teresa Kilbane teaches a policy course on children and families in both Rome and Chicago and is currently doing a study comparing the experiences. She believes the class in Rome provides a particularly intense learning experience because the group shares the excitement of a new country and new experiences. Last year’s class included four students who were retired and starting new careers, including a 70-year-old trial lawyer who sat on the board of a social service agency. Through the international experience, said Kilbane, “the traditional and non-traditional students interacted more and on a deeper level.”

Nancy Williams at the University of Georgia leads students to Northern Ireland for a three-week summer trip that focuses on peace and social justice. Students visit Catholic and Protestant counseling centers and volunteer in a child-care program where mothers of both faiths attend workshops together. Nicole Orlando plans to be a social worker in the United States, but Northern Ireland “prepared me to listen to people’s trauma. I learned how to listen and not just hear the

Starting and Sustaining International Social Work Programs

GODENZI AND DAVIDSON note in their report on the 2007 International Social Work Conference that Schools of Social Work “have been engaged in international projects for many years. However, most of the initiatives were contingent on an individual dean, director, or faculty’s proclivity to international matters rather than a result of systematic and comprehensive planning efforts.” Sustainability is a key priority for Godenzi as a leader in the movement to increase international experiences for social work students. “My first mantra is ‘let’s do no harm.’ You find lots of examples where people

start something and it’s worse when it’s over....Work has to benefit partners as well as our students, but we won’t do anything where we can’t clearly measure a positive experience for our partners and build a long-term relationship.” He prefers to establish field placements with organizations that are already working in their local communities so the program doesn’t collapse if a particular faculty member or dean leaves.

In some cases, the university affiliation creates natural linkages to create international programs. The Jesuit network helps both Boston College and Loyola University build al-

liances around the world. At Loyola, de Haymes says the local connection to Catholic Charities makes it possible to bring Mexican students to Chicago because Catholic Charities provides free lodging and transportation in return for the students’ work in the organization’s social service programs. To initiate the exchange between Loyola University and Universidad Iberoamericana, de Haymes leveraged existing relationships among academics working in the field of migration. “I felt total confidence in faculty members and their ability to follow up with students.”

The potential for follow up and supervision is crucial to a successful

surface of their stories.” She also brought home a notion of therapy that is more relaxed. “Having tea is big. They’ll sit and talk while having tea. That relaxation has allowed me to be more relaxed here.”

Student Heather Kotler expects to be a family and couples therapist who said the trip to Northern Ireland “helped me look at conflict resolution in a different way, especially the way trauma ripples out in a family in multiple generations.” Kotler never thought she would go on an education abroad program because she is married with young children, “but this sounded so interesting and special and the length of time was manageable.”

The experience of group travel itself can be profound. “Even if you don’t get exact skills for your career,” commented Orlando, “being in a different culture helps you throughout your life professionally.” Williams refers to the value of students being “yanked out of their comfort zone.”

“The tools of the trade in social work,” continues Williams, “are the ability to create relationships. What better way than to do it in a more egalitarian way, when they aren’t the ones in control in their agency with their forms and their bureaucratic layers?” Williams also appreciates the value of leading students on these journeys. “You are much more vulnerable than in a classroom where you are in control. It’s an exploratory experience for faculty.” Has it changed the way she teaches back home? “I’m more comfortable not knowing. I see students more cooperatively. I have more humility and realize that I am constantly growing and learning.”

Ron Marks is the dean of the School of Social Work at Tulane University in New Orleans, where he regularly leads graduate students to the

North Indian community of Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama and a large Tibetan refugee community. A Tulane alumnus runs a small non-governmental organization in the community helping refugees making the transition to living in India. During a month long visit, U.S. students observe, work in the language school, provide social service assessments, and meet residents of the community. Marks believes even this brief experience can be truly transformative. “Students see something outside their paradigm, something that doesn’t make sense in their worldview and they begin to struggle with those issues....They won’t automatically learn from a place of confusion. They need a trusted, reliable leader and a safe space where people can trust each other and process their experiences. We met every third or fourth evening to talk about our experiences.” In addition, says Marks, “because of the smallness of the community where we are based, students were able to see how they could make a difference with a small amount of money and some effort.”

Because of his strong belief in the power of these international experiences, Marks hired a director of international programming to develop an international social work certificate as part of Tulane’s M.S.W. program. The certificate program is being launched this year, requiring a full semester of field work overseas or domestically working on international issues. This year’s students will be doing field work in India, Honduras, and Ethiopia. Eileen Ihrig is developing the certificate program for Tulane after 10 years working overseas in humanitarian aid programs, where she felt social workers were very much underrepresented.

Few if any universities require an international field placement for M.S.W. students, in large part because of the cost. In a recent study of 58

international field placement. Initially, this was a problem for student Amanda Loge when she established her own field placement in Peru. The center where she worked did not have experience with interns or social workers, only volunteers, and she had to be assertive in defining her role. Ultimately, she created a chain of supervision that began with the Dean of Social Work at a university in Peru and ended with a supervisor at the University of Minnesota who spoke Spanish.

When Mark Rodgers is identifying agencies for potential field placements for Dominican students, he looks at the level of professionalism and actual service the agency is providing, the quality of supervision for advanced social work students, and the potential for sustainability. At Tulane, Eileen Ihrig talks with potential partners about

what students are capable of offering and how the agency can best use those skills. Ihrig came to Tulane with a background in providing safety and security for expatriates involved in aid work in places like Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Romania. So she also stresses the importance of assessing the safety of housing and other living conditions before she identifies field placement sites.

Robin Mama at Monmouth adds that the partners overseas, both agencies and universities, need to know what is expected of them. Graduate M.S.W. programs at U.S. institutions that are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education must meet certain requirements for field internships, and the overseas institutions must be capable of meeting these expectations. At home, Mama says it's important to identify students

who have the emotional maturity for an international field placement. In the beginning, it was also important to have the support of the college administration beyond the School of Social Work. "Monmouth supported our investigative travel, supported marketing the program, and supported students going into places that aren't always comfortable," explained Mama. The international concentration that began with four students now has 20–23 each year, including partnerships with the University of Ghana, the National Autonomous University in Mexico, an NGO in Bangladesh, as well as programs in Sicily and Chile. Monmouth also offers several competitive fellowships specifically for students in the international and community development concentration.

accredited social work programs in the United States, 45 percent offered international field placements, typically for periods of 8–16 weeks.

Emily Greising was placed with Habitat for Humanity in Ghana during her field placement in Boston College's Graduate School of Social Work Global Practice Concentration. She created a mortgage-tracking system and drafted stories about beneficiaries to use in marketing the program—skills she will use as a social worker in public relations. She wrote in a college newsletter that "It is not until one leaves his or her comfort zone that one is truly able to realize what is important. Traveling internationally is an incredible test for anyone looking for a personal challenge."

Amanda Loge created her own field placement as an M.S.W. student at the University of Minnesota, investigating universities in Peru that had social work programs and connecting with Peruvians in St. Paul who helped her find the Hogar de Cristo agency in Arequipa, Peru. She conducted intake interviews with new children and families and led parent meetings and psychosocial groups for children. The daily challenges she encountered were often extreme. "During the last visit I did, there were chickens wondering in and out of the room while I chatted with the mother. Often there are only one or two beds for an entire family, which can lead to problems with sexual abuse and promiscuity." And yet, it was the relationships that she built with kids and families that brought her the greatest joy. She learned to navigate bureaucratic annoyances to meet her own needs and the needs of the families with whom she worked.

After a full year in Peru, Loge is now back home supervising a Salvation Army office in North Minneapolis. "I grew a lot in my knowledge

of myself and my self-confidence, making it possible for me to be a supervisor." She is able to converse easily when a Spanish-speaking client comes in the door. She has also learned to solve problems more creatively. "In Peru, people would have chicken dinners to raise money. Here I help people brainstorm ways to find resources within their own lives." Loge also believes she works more effectively with immigrant clients because she understands "what it feels like to be in the minority, to be the one always standing out in the crowd."

At Monmouth University, Paul Longo seeks to provide opportunities for students to develop real relationships doing real work. A student in Ghana worked with abandoned, HIV-positive girls who were living on the street. After three weeks of observation, the student began to develop parenting classes, help with sewing classes, and interact with the girls trying to find their families. In Southern India, a student helped identify the potential job skills of local women who had lost their fishermen husbands to the tsunami. In Chile, American students helped organized tours of a peace park that had been a torture center, learning how to acknowledge this history even while they celebrated its demise.

Since 1992, the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina has offered a master's of social work program in Seoul, Korea, in collaboration with Kangnam and several other Korean universities. There is a cultural orientation program for U.S. faculty who teach in Korea, and Korean interpreters with advanced degrees in social work from American schools participate in each class. A member of the first graduating class in 2002 was subsequently elected president of the Korean Association of Social Workers.

Two-Way Learning

"We must be able to listen and learn from people everywhere whether or not they have degrees," says Paul Longo, drawing attention to the fact that international programs in social work have too often been a vehicle to export knowledge and values of the United States. Exchanges increasingly bring foreign students and faculty to the United States for broader collaborations. Professors from the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes in Mexico will provide a series of lectures on Mexican social work at Dominican University's Chicago campus while Mexican students work in immigration issues and community development at a Hispanic organization in Chicago.

Loyola University Chicago also brings Mexican students to its American campus. Professor Maria Vidal de Haymes says many of the Mexican students are from privileged classes, with no direct experience working with migrant families. Mexican student María Ocampo Garcia said the experience of "being in another country, trying to understand how things work, and having the opportunity to work with a different reality than the one I always knew gave me a lot of personal and professional satisfaction." Ocampo Garcia and fellow student Mariana Peláez created a documentary film about a small shrine in Maryville, Illinois, which has become a gathering place for Mexican immigrants. A local Mexican newspaper gave them a weekly column to share their experiences. "What most drew our attention was that around this religious figure has formed a very large community who meet mainly because of faith but also as immigrant people who are in continuous search of a self-identity," wrote Peláez. Universidad Iberoamericana, like Loyola, is now starting to offer certificates in migration studies. A fieldwork assignment abroad to study the other side of immigration is a crucial component of the certificate. Peláez concluded that "only by looking at the problem from both countries can we understand the situation with an objective stance."

Abi Gadea from Uruguay is seeking dual graduate degrees from the University of Minnesota in public health and social work. Gadea ultimately expects to work in Uruguay at the community level on indigenous rights, citizen empowerment, and community organizing. During a field placement in

Honduras, she helped evaluate a nutritional program by designing a personal pictorial diary that could be used with mothers who have low reading and writing skills. Says Gadea, "I think it is particularly important for social workers to have more of an idea about how people lived before coming here and how they survived in their own countries. I think it is always valuable to see how other people in other countries live, work, struggle and be happy."

Globalizing the Curriculum

There is a strong, active interest in adding international content to the graduate social work curriculum whether or not this is coupled with actual travel, Ihrig says. Tulane faculty are expanding their existing topic areas, looking through an international lens, and infusing their courses and syllabi with international content, including such international conventions as the rights of the child and human rights. Kofi Danso with the Council on Social Work Education has compiled a list of graduate and undergraduate courses that address interna-

tional issues related to policy, ethics, racism and oppression, migration, human rights, economic justice, human behavior, diversity, and women.

At the University of Georgia, Williams wants to connect her M.S.W. students with the large international community on campus, especially family members who are often marginalized and isolated. "We need to institutionalize a better way of bringing those family members into the fold," says Williams, who plans to partner two graduate M.S.W. students with an international student.

Looking Ahead

Enthusiasm for international social work education is bubbling over among students, faculty, and practitioners. The International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers are even working on new definitions of social work, noting that the profession in the twenty-first century is dynamic and evolving. New avenues for partnerships are being sought. At Tulane, Ron Marks is working on a project with the Peace Corps. Returned Peace Corps volunteers will be able to earn combined M.S.W. and master's in public health degrees at Tulane, completing their field work

Online Resources

Council on Social Work Education
<http://www.cswe.org/CSWE/>

International Association of Schools of Social Work
<http://www.iasw-aiets.org/>

International Social Work Clearinghouse
<http://www.iswclearinghouse.org>
Includes reports from 2007 International Social Work Conference

International Social Work Conference 2008
<http://iswconference.org/>

Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education
<http://www.cswe.org/CSWE/centers/kendall>

Planet Social Work
www.planetsocialwork.com
A global social work community, devoted to international social work practice and education.

University of Calgary International Social Development Unit
<http://homepages.ucalgary.ca/~isdu/>

Student Handbook:
MSW International Concentration
http://fsw.ucalgary.ca/files/fsw/MSW_International_student_handbook.pdf



A Boston College Graduate School of Social Work student during a field visit in Tanzania.

with the Crisis Corps, a Peace Corps program that sends returned volunteers for short-term assignments around the world. Up to 10 students are expected to launch the Tulane program this fall.

At Dominican, Rodgers is responding to a State Department initiative seeking universities with partnerships in Mexico. Dominican and the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes in Mexico expect to work together to train police, judges, and other law enforcement personnel in Mexico. Rodgers will look for American students interested in working directly with children and adults as well as those seeking to develop indigenous training agencies.

There are also numerous efforts within the social work profession to organize and standardize international learning opportunities. The University of Calgary coordinates a consortium of social welfare practitioners and scholars working in Argentina, Canada, China, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Iraq, Malaysia, and the Palestinian territories. This International Social Development Unit is a “virtual institution for engaging in global research within the caring professions.” Narda Razack, graduate program director at York University in Toronto chairs the International Task Force on Research and Exchanges, formed by the International Association of Schools of Social Work to respond to the “current surge of international practica especially from north to south.” The task force is in the process of formulating international guidelines for research and practica.

The National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD) of Schools of Social Work now has a Global Commission for Social Work Education that is influencing accreditation standards and curriculum. Godenzi says NADD members are discussing the possibility of a “social workers without borders” initiative. Godenzi has

also been instrumental in establishing a clearinghouse for research on international social work education. Ihrig wants to see the social work profession become more actively involved internationally beyond exchanging students and faculty, engaging directly with local communities, conducting research that supports the development needs of communities. “We must move beyond just exporting our social work education model,” insists Ihrig.

In 2004 the Council on Social Work Education established the Katherine A. Kendall Institute for International Social Work Education, honoring an icon in the field who was writing international social work as far back as 1950. A study by Kendall at the time resulted in a United Nations General Assembly resolution declaring social work a professional activity requiring university-level preparation. The Kendall Institute’s International Fellowship Program encourages international partnerships in research and program development, but Kendall says the Institute is especially concerned with “moving international content from the periphery into the mainstream of social work education. The programs we are currently initiating deal with cutting edge problems such as disaster management, relief, and immigration.”

“When people of different origins and backgrounds find mutually beneficial ways of cooperation to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and access to health services,” conclude Godenzi and Davidson in their 2007 International Social Work Conference report, “it will increase capacity on various levels, and it will form bonds that bridge cultural and structural differences.”

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