Cover Sheet
Assessment Project
Spring & Summer—2009

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7. Project Title: **The Assessment of Foundation-level Strategies to Achieve Deep Learning in Social Work Education**

8. Project Dates: **January 1, 2009-August 31, 2009**

9. Project Checklist

   __X___ Statement of support from the department chair or school dean by email to lhouser@iupui.edu (separate file)

   __X__ Budget

   __X__ IRB approval - IRB will be pursued and approval will be forwarded by 1/1/09.

   The grant monies requested will be utilized to assess the effectiveness of multiple learning

   strategies in S513. We are requesting $1,000 for each project director. In addition, $500 is

   requested for a graduate student to assist the projects directors with data analyses, conducting

   a focus group, and presentation/manuscript preparation.

Assessment Project Proposal: The Assessment of Foundation-level Strategies to Achieve Deep Learning in Social Work Education

1. Abstract: The proposed project will assess the effectiveness of learning strategies utilized in core Foundation courses for MSW students. We will assess these learning strategies as to whether they enhance deep learning by using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) scale. We will correlate the achievement of Foundation year program objectives with deep learning through student self-report as well as comparing the ranking of learning strategies and focus group data. Building upon departmental efforts to identify learning strategies to enhance the specific objectives in the Foundation year, results of this assessment may have implications for the overall learning strategies throughout the Foundation year, and beyond.

2. Project Proposal:

Social work educators, as all educators preparing students for a wide range of professional practice, are challenged to prepare students not only for the challenges for today, but for the challenges of the future. In addition to learning academic content as required by Education and Policy Statement of the professional accreditation body (Council on Social Work Education, 2008), students must be able to apply this knowledge using what educators are now calling "practical reason" (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008, p. xvi). Critical thinking skills are vital to student comprehension of the research on evidence-based practice as well as the synthesis of practice wisdom gained from mentors in practicum and the individual context that clients with diverse backgrounds bring to each practice encounter. Critical thinking requires students to integrate and synthesize knowledge, skills which are fostered through deep approaches to learning (Biggs, 2003; Entwhistle & McCune, 2004; Tagg, 2003). To provide a curriculum that increases student skills in practical reasoning, research is needed to determine which pedagogical strategies facilitate learning of specific program objectives.

The IU School of Social Work has instituted a process of introducing students to reflective writing through the use of a model of structured critical reflection – the DEAL model (Ash & Clayton, 2004). Qualitative research has been conducted on this model (McGuire, Lay & Peters, 2008) and the results indicated that the model did facilitate critical thinking and encourage integration of theory with practice. We have worked to integrate the DEAL model of structured critical reflection for our initial course in the MSW program, for all our incoming students. Some faculty members use the model in subsequent courses in the Foundation year, and into the Concentration year. This research will provide data to determine whether this learning strategy, as well as many others typically utilized in MSW education, supports the achievement of the learning objectives of the Foundation year of the MSW program (the first 30 credit hours of the 60 hour major).

A. **Purpose of the Project:** The proposed project will assess the effectiveness of diverse learning strategies (DEAL Structured Critical Reflections, Service Learning, Substantive Writing, Lecture, Class/Forum Discussions, Videos, Role Plays, Assigned Readings, and Practicum Experience) utilized in Foundation courses for MSW students. Additionally, we will assess these learning strategies as to whether they enhance deep learning (Biggs, 2003; Entwhistle & McCune, 2004; Tagg, 2003) by using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Laird, Shoup, Kuh, & Schwarz, 2008), a self-report scale developed by the Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University School of Education. We will correlate the achievement of Foundation-year learning objectives with deep learning by student self-report as well as comparing the evaluation of learning strategies. This research builds upon departmental efforts to identify innovative learning strategies which enhance social work education in general (McGuire, Lay & Peters, 2008; Lay & McGuire, 2008). Results of this assessment may have implications for the overall learning strategies we may choose to employ throughout the Foundation year, and potentially, through the Concentration coursework. Specifically, the utilization of structured critical reflection as a strategy for integration with the overall MSW curriculum will be explored through

the focus on this one course which attempts to integrate theoretical knowledge for professional

practice, the basic Foundation for the professional practice of social work.

      B. Intended Outcomes of the Project: The intended outcome of this project is to understand

the impact of a variety of learning strategies on the achievement of course learning objectives and deep

learning in order to further develop these strategies. Additionally, we want to better understand the

impact of the DEAL Model of Structured Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2004; McGuire, Lay, & Peters,

2008; Lay & McGuire, 2008) on achievement of Foundation learning objectives and deep learning.

      C. Assessment Methods: Data will be collected from MSW students in their second semester of

the Foundation year of the MSW program. We will limit the study to full-time students so that we are

reasonably sure that they are completing the required coursework prior to moving into the

Concentration coursework. Basic demographic data (age, gender, race, etc,) will be collected as well as

a measure on the previous social service employment experience of the respondent. We will collect:

         Self-report scores on the achievement of the Foundation program objectives

         Self-report scores on effectiveness of multiple learning strategies in achieving the

            Foundation program objectives

         Self-report scores on the NSSE Deep Learning scale

     Using the program objectives for the Foundation Year of the MSW program (See Appendix A),

we will ask students to identify to what extent each of a number of learning strategies utilized in their

Foundation-level coursework facilitated each of the program objectives. We will also measure to what

extent students felt like they achieved those program objectives. We will also ask them to evaluate

deep learning in the Foundation year using the NSSE Deep Learning Scale. This scale consists of three

constructs: higher order learning, integrative learning and reflective learning. Internal consistency of

the item groups ranged from .71 to .89 and confirmatory factor analysis supported a representation of

deep learning as a second-order construct related with the three first-order constructs of the sub-scales (Nelson Laird, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008).

A 5-point Likert scale will be used to assess student achievement of the Foundation program objectives as well as a rating as to which learning strategies helped students achieve those program objectives. These measures will allow us to identify relationships between and among variables, particularly between specific learning strategies and deep learning and the achievement of Foundation-level course objectives. We hypothesize that students, who rate reflection assignments higher, will have a higher score on achievement of course objectives as well as on the deep learning scale. In addition to these quantitative measures, we will also conduct focus groups with students to further explore and potentially triangulate the survey results.

D. Data Analysis to be Employed: We will perform a number of statistical analyses on the data including ANOVA, using students who highly rate reflection assignments high, medium or low, to determine overall achievement of program objectives and deep learning. ANOVA may also be used to determine whether variance in scores could be explained by demographic data collected. We will also use stepwise multiple regression analysis to attempt to correlate specific learning strategies to the achievement of the program objectives and deep learning.

We will also utilize content analysis from focus group data to identify themes in student achievement of foundation program objectives which may triangulate data from the quantitative analysis. Content analysis will allow the presentation of thick description in the words of the participants to provide additional information about the findings as well as identify additional factors not captured by the numbers.

E. Methods of Evaluation and Dissemination of the Results: Results of this study will have implications for MSW education at this School as well as for social work education across the nation. In addition, the results may be of interest to other academic units on the IUPUI campus. Both researchers

have been regular presenters at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education as well as at venues on the scholarship of teaching here at IUPUI, such as the Moore Symposium. Although this study is directed to graduate education, the results also have implications for undergraduate social work education; particularly around strategies of learning that enhance deep learning.

     F. Details on Use of Findings for Program Improvement: Both researchers are participants in the MSW curriculum committee for the Indiana University School of Social Work and the findings would definitely be disseminated to the committee to be used to inform ongoing curriculum renewal. Current program evaluation efforts for the MSW program have been focused on the overall program objectives, rather than just the Foundation-level program objectives. This research would support current program evaluation efforts by providing important information on the achievement of these interim objectives that may well inform the larger process for the overall MSW program objectives.

Budget

Personnel:	Amount
Project Directors	
Kathy Lay	$1000
(Summer Pay 2009)	
Lisa McGuire	$1000
(Summer Pay 2009)	
Student Assistant	$ 500
(10$ per hour for 50 hours)	
TOTAL	**$2500**

References

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assessment. *Innovative Higher Education, 29*(2).

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Appendix A: Foundation Program Objectives

Indiana University School of Social Work

Social work education is grounded in the liberal arts and contains a coherent, integrated professional foundation in social work. The graduate advanced curriculum is built from the professional foundation. Graduates of baccalaureate and master's social work programs demonstrate the capacity to meet the foundation objectives and objectives unique to the program. Graduates of master's social work programs also demonstrate the capacity to meet advanced program objectives.

Foundation Program Objectives

The professional foundation, which is essential to the practice of any social worker, includes, but is not limited to, the following program objectives. Graduates demonstrate the ability to:

1. Apply critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice.
2. Understand the value base of the profession its ethical standards and principles, and practice accordingly.
3. Practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge and skills related to clients' age, class, color, culture disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation.
4. Understand the forms and mechanism of oppression and discrimination and apply strategies of advocacy and social change that advance social and economic justice.
5. Understand and interpret the history of the social work profession and its contemporary structures and issues.
6. Apply the knowledge and skills of a generalist social work perspective to practice with systems of all sizes.
7. Use theoretical frameworks supported by empirical evidence to understand individual development and behavior across the life span and the interactions among individuals and between individuals and families, groups, organizations and communities.
8. Analyze, formulate and influence social polices.
9. Evaluate research studies, apply research findings to practice, and evaluate their own practice interventions.
10. Use communication skills differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities.
11. Use supervision and consultation appropriate to social work practice.
12. Function within the structure of organizations and service delivery systems and seek necessary organizational change.