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Human Services Training In Tribal Colleges

By Rodger Hornby and Richard H. Dana

Tribal colleges are providing interdisciplinary education and professional training for human services occupations at the undergraduate level. These programs also promote cultural competence as a result of required courses in tribal languages, history, culture and law. The Sinte Gleska University program is described as an example of the role of tribal college education in emphasizing cultural identity using a culture-specific instructional style and teaching method. These programs in tribal colleges will augment the availability of competent service to native Americans.

Native Americans are being increasingly educated by tribal colleges that train students at the associate or at the bachelor's level (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989). These tribal colleges have increased the college completion rates for their students, which have been the lowest among minority groups in this country (Astin, 1982).

Although mental health services are now more readily available for native Americans (Manson & Trimble, 1982), these services have not been used often for a variety of reasons. Anglo service providers frequently have not understood the needs and styles of service delivery that are compatible with cultural beliefs (Dana, 1990). Despite good intentions and the absence of prejudice, most non-Indian professionals have been unable to comprehend or to respect the world views and cultural codes of persons who diverge markedly from their own Eurocentric perception of reality.

Programs for training professional service providers have been unable to recruit students from minority groups, particularly native Americans, in more than token numbers. This low representation has occurred because the contemporary educational system does not recognize cultural differences in learning styles, or the necessity for a culture-specific context in order to render the material meaningful. As a result, a major educational resource for training culturally competent service providers is presently at the undergraduate level in human service programs, especially in the tribal colleges.

Persons with less than professional training at the master's and doctoral level (indigenous counselors, community helpers or undergraduates with professional training) have not only been major providers of services in the Indian Health Service but have instituted a "seedbed" for professional training programs (Attneave, 1984). In Alaska, Eskimos and other Alaskan natives are trained locally as indigenous psychotherapists to provide counseling services in their own communities. (Torrey, 1970).

The tribal colleges are able to offer not only training for cultural competence in providing human services, but also offer training in counseling as a good Lakota or Navajo or Salish, for example. In addition, these colleges provide a setting in which the educational experiences can be prolonged by students who

prefer to live at home and typically must work to support themselves and their families while they receive training. This paper describes one human service program that has caused quite an impact at Sinte Gleska University. The training format and experiences in this program not only respond to the training and service needs of American Indian people, but also offers an educational experience that is also relevant to the needs of non-Indian students and clients.

Sinte Gleska University's Human Services Program

The Human Service Program is designed to train competent mid-level professionals who are ready to assume professional responsibilities. Students are provided knowledge and insights in human services within a culturally different reservation context. Thus, Indian and non-Indian students are prepared to work competently within the complex and demanding setting of modern reservation and Indian life, and in off-reservation positions with Indian and non-Indian clients.

The program offers both an associate degree and a bachelor of arts degree in human services. Students are able to choose from three areas of emphasis: criminal justice, mental health/social services and chemical dependency. Only an associate degree is offered in chemical dependency. The Human Services Department consists of five faculty positions with two positions in psychology, one in anthropology, one in criminal justice, and one in chemical dependency. Two of these positions, one in psychology and one in chemical dependency, are unfilled at this time.

The human services curriculum is designed to be completed in a series of sequential steps in order to provide an ever-increasing skills and knowledge base. In addition to the required college courses, students begin an intense involvement in specific content and skills courses upon completion of the introductory courses in sociology and psychology. The program, in cooperation with general college standards, requires each student to complete a semester of Lakota language and a semester of Lakota history and culture. Upper division students are also required to complete the Lakota medicine course which presents contemporary and traditional Lakota healing practices. In this course, medicine men and respected tribal elders assist the instructor to allow students the opportunity not only to learn about traditional healing practices but also to participate in them as well. Students are also required to take one semester of tribal law, treaties, and government in order to gain a better understanding of legal and federal issues with historical as well as contemporary impact upon Indian life. Additional Lakota classes are encouraged as electives.

Required courses within a criminal justice emphasis follow the format utilized by most universities. Students are required to complete 128 hours of course work for the program and for

the bachelor's degree. This training generally directs individuals toward occupations in court services, probation, parole, law enforcement and the legal profession. Specific classes that have a more specialized focus include Reservation Legal Systems, Problems in Criminal Justice, and Criminal Law. Considerable time is spent in each of the criminal justice courses contextualizing material to reservation and Indian life. Mental health/social services content courses are designed to provide a generalist background to each student.

Mental health/social service program students, like all human services majors, must complete the Lakota language, culture, and tribal law courses and have some exposure to criminal justice issues, as well as the 128 hours of course work in order to complete the bachelor's degree. Content courses are designed to be skill-specific and include a four-semester series of counseling courses which must be completed in sequence. Courses in crisis intervention, adjustment, human development, reservation analysis, race and ethnic relations, and abnormal behavior comprise the bulk of the program's required course work.

A critically important aspect of both the mental health/social service and criminal justice degree programs is the requirement for five field placements in various local community and reservation human service agencies in order to learn about the goals, problems and services provided by these agencies. Students assume the role of employed workers and are bound by agency guidelines of work hours and professional confidentiality. Each field placement requires 120 hours of on-site work by the student. Sites are rotated in order to enable each student to have a wide exposure and involvement in human service agencies.

Students working for an associate of arts degree in human services must complete 64 hours of course work, including required college courses, human service emphasis courses, and courses in Lakota language, culture and tribal law. Examples of human service courses include Counseling Methods I and II, Introduction to Criminal Justice, Anthropology, and Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among American Indians. Students are also required to complete two field placements.

The associate degree in chemical dependency requires 67 hours of course work and provides the hours and specific course work necessary for Level I certification as a chemical dependency counselor in South Dakota. Although many students have associate degree goals, most continue working toward a bachelor's degree in human services.

A general characteristic of all human service classes is that they are high in content and demand for demonstrated competency of materials. Counseling classes require counseling sessions to be audiotaped, acceptable social summaries to be written, reasonable treatment plans to be formulated, mental status exams to be conducted, and case notes provided for client records. All work must be typed and grammatically correct.

Discussion of Sinte Program

The Sinte Gleska Human Services Program is effective in training both local residents and other native Americans as service providers within their own community. Relevant training is also being provided to non-native persons, enabling them to work with native and dominant culture recipients of services. The program has awarded 27 bachelor of arts degrees and 51 associate of arts degrees in human services through September 1990. There are 69 students currently enrolled, including 14 non-Indian students.

Graduates of the Human Services Program have continued their education and are successfully employed. After completing their associate degrees, many students have continued at the college working toward a bachelor's degree in human services. Eight bachelor degree students have completed graduate work primarily in social work and law. Several associate degree students are now receiving training in nursing. These students report that their preparation for continued education exceeded that of many of their peers and they expressed positive feelings about their knowledge and human service skills. The first human services bachelor's degree recipient at Sinta Gleska University completed a state university law degree and is now chief tribal judge for the Rosebud Sioux tribe, while another bachelor's degree program student is an associate judge.

The majority of graduates are employed by human service agencies on or near the reservation, including several who completed master of social work degrees. Bachelor and associate degree graduates are working for state and tribal social services, mental health agencies, court and paralegal services, state drug enforcement agencies, tribal police, domestic violence centers, and tribal and church alcohol programs. Many of these graduates hold supervisory positions and are shaping future human service policy for native Americans.

The success of this program may be attributed to several distinctive goals and methods. First, there is an emphasis on cultural identity as essential to a meaningful life. Explicit in this fostering of cultural identity is the recognition that services must be provided within the cultural context of clients. This context is addressed by requirements for courses in Lakota language and Lakota history and culture. Moreover, many of the problems experienced by native American clients have either been caused or intensified as a result of the uneasy interface with the dominant society and the direct or indirect effects of discrimination and racism.

Second, both native American and non-Indian students are being trained to provide services to native and non-native clients. The implication of this practice is that non-native service providers have something to offer native clients whenever they are culturally competent.

Moreover, native American providers have something of value that comes from their identity and world view to offer to non-Indian clients. For example, the belief that so-called co-dependency is not pathological for non-Indians but is perhaps

necessary in order to stimulate experiences in giving and in sharing. This belief, among others, can more readily become part of a counseling process whenever the service provider is a minority person, especially a native American.

Third, native American values are emphasized in the teaching methods used. Learning is a group effort and includes the teacher. The teaching style is personalized and individualized within the context of an enlarged teacher-student relationship that was often present before the course work and will endure after the training is completed. As a result, the teacher-student relationship emphasizes trust and is part-and-parcel of the social fabric of life for both teacher and student.

Fourth, there are clear differences between these programs and similar programs in Anglo educational settings. The program has no allegiance to a particular profession (e.g. social work, clinical psychology, counseling). This means that its approach to knowledge stems from a broad, interdisciplinary approach. As a result, the socialization of service providers is not a specific professional identity per se but is focused on services that can be provided to clients. In addition, undergraduate, pre-professional programs in the dominant society often do not include enough practical experience. Students are seldom allowed to have supervised experience with clients in service delivery settings. The Human Services Program is one of the few programs nationally which combines cognitive and experiential learning.

Fifth, this program emphasizes some intrinsic goals of their students. For example, more adequate human services for all tribes may be feasible as a result of this program and others like it in tribal colleges. In addition, not only can education be received near home and family, but it also can be combined with work to help the family.

Training in the Dominant Society

Mental health services are now inadequate for the burgeoning populations of culturally different persons that include refugees, illegal immigrants and ethnic groups in the United States. Moreover, it will not be long before these minority groups comprise one-third of the entire population and even the majority population in some states. As a result, there is an attempt to maintain the status quo and to delay any shift in the balance of political power that may be a precursor to increased expenditures for these populations and more widespread expectations for culturally competent service providers. Human service programs in tribal colleges can assume a leadership role in this transformation of the training required for these new service priorities.

These new priorities will require service providers who understand and share the culture of the clients, as well as speak the native language wherever appropriate and necessary. In the immediate future, many of these service providers will not

be identified with the pejorative label and status of paraprofessional or with any currently recognized mental health profession. Eventually, it is not unreasonable to believe that there will be a new classification of professional service providers, because the existing professionals have become so thoroughly identified with the Eurocentric world view that cultural issues are not credible. As a result, the established human service professions have taken only token steps to recruit minority students or to provide cultural competence training for all of their students. Δ

An abbreviated form of this paper was presented at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, Ninth Annual Conference, Bismarck, North Dakota, April 9, 1990, under the title of Human Services for Non-Traditional Students. Sherry Klein, Criminal Justice Program, Sinte Gleska University, also participated in this presentation.

Rodger Hornby has been teaching in the Human Services Department at Sinte Gleska College for 10 years. He received a Master's Degree in Psychology for the University of Wyoming and subsequently directed a community mental health center and a training school in Wyoming and a children's residential program in Ashland, Montana.

Richard H. Dana is Principal Investigator of a Research and Training Center project that is examining culturally competent mental health services. His publication history has included two books of readings on native American alcoholism (with Rodger Hornby) and human services for cultural minorities.

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