



**At the Border: Beginning Dialogue and Partnership Between a California University and a Mexican Practice Community**

<b>Journal:</b>	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
<b>Article Title:</b>	<i>At the Border: Beginning Dialogue and Partnership Between a California University and a Mexican Practice Community</i>
<b>Author(s):</b>	<i>Sally G. Mathiesen, Terry Carrilio, Lucinda Rasmussen, David Engstrom</i>
<b>Volume and Issue Number:</b>	<i>Vol. 7 No. 1</i>
<b>Manuscript ID:</b>	<i>71042</i>
<b>Page Number:</b>	<i>42</i>
<b>Year:</b>	<i>2004</i>

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work or its Center for Social Work Research.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter) by the Center for Social Work Research at 1 University Station, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Journal subscriptions are \$110. Our website at [www.profdevjournal.org](http://www.profdevjournal.org) contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

Copyright © by The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work's Center for Social Work Research. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.

ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: [www.profdevjournal.org](http://www.profdevjournal.org)

Email: [www.profdevjournal.org/contact](mailto:www.profdevjournal.org/contact)

# **At the Border: Beginning Dialogue and Partnership Between a California University and a Mexican Practice Community**

*Sally Mathiesen, Ph.D.; Terry Carrilio, Ph.D.; Lucinda Rasmussen, Ph.D.; David Engstrom, Ph.D.*

The social work profession is committed to cultural competence (NASW, 2001) and to using the understanding of culture to empower individuals and communities (Green, 1999; Lum, 2003). International social work is an emerging area in which social workers are challenged to develop and maintain knowledge and skills that reflect an in-depth understanding of different cultures and societies. Social workers have been involved with international work for many decades, and the profession has been trying to cope with the shortage of well-trained, bilingual, culturally competent social workers since the 1980s (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 201).

With the growing pressures of globalization (Lechner, 2003; Porter, 2003) it is increasingly important for social workers to work with broader, international communities. Hokenstad, Khinduka, and Midgley (1992) noted that amid the increasing ethnic strife around the globe, social work has much to contribute in terms of mediating and facilitating cross-cultural issues related to social welfare. Increasing interdependence among countries requires that social workers address international issues at the case and policy levels and engage in mutual problem solving (Healy, 2001). Estes (1992) urged the internationalization of social work as a critical pathway to becoming a world citizen; others have called it the way to avoid "cultural myopia" (Sanders & Pedersen, 1984). Some have proposed that the exchange of knowledge and influences from other societies is necessary for the survival of social work (Nagy & Falk, 2000) and that the collective viability of all professions is at

stake (Rosenthal, 2000).

Nowhere is the need for understanding cultural processes greater than in communities that border another country. It is at this crossroad that biases may be reinforced or dispelled, differences may be appreciated or pathologized, and languages may be used as a means of enhancing understanding or used as a wedge to separate and distort. Continuing education for community professionals, faculty, and students that helps them to negotiate this highly charged and changing environment is essential.

The purpose of this article is to present a model of international engagement. The model is illustrated by a case study of the emerging relationship between faculty members from a state university and community-based social service workers in a California-Mexico border city. The binational relationship is presented as a continuing education response to this unique practice environment. The following section discusses the knowledge, skills and values needed by workers in this environment, including: a thorough knowledge of binational pressures, enhanced faculty and professional skills, understanding of the challenges of international field placements and the value of reciprocity as a key value to be maintained in the relationship.

## **Knowledge of Bi-national Issues**

International social work at the border between two countries poses special challenges. The needs go well beyond individual faculty research and student exchanges. In a region that is clearly a contact point between two countries with different languages, cultures and history, it is important for

---

*Sally Mathiesen, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor at San Diego State University School of Social Work.*

*Terry Carrilio, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor at San Diego State University School of Social Work.*

*Lucinda Rasmussen, Ph.D. is Associate Professor at San Diego State University School of Social Work.*

*David Engstrom, Ph.D. is Associate Professor at San Diego State University School of Social Work.*

*Please direct all communication to: Dr. Sally Mathiesen, Assistant Professor; San Diego State University School of Social Work 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182-4119 TEL: 619-594-0790; FAX: 619-594-5991; Email: smathiesen@sbcglobal.net*

*Seymour J. Rosenthal is former Director of the Center for Social Policy and Community Development, Associate Dean for Research and Community Development, and currently Professor, School of Social*

social workers to understand the interests, pressures, and concerns of individuals and families who often request service on both sides of the border. Contiguity, scale of migration and population concentration (Huntington, 2004) all present unique challenges to cross border dialogues. The differences in worldview and economies of the two countries that share the largest land border of a first and third world country (Huntington, 2004, p. 33), and the historic misunderstandings on both sides contribute to the complexity of the dialogue. A meaningful engagement between social work professionals in both countries is needed in order to identify systematic approaches to resolving some of the mutual challenges that both communities face. This requires identifying stakeholders, initiating a dialogue, and listening to each other. In the case of the Mexico-US border, the history and frustration experienced both at institutional and individual levels often leads to misunderstandings. While communication is essential in any relationship, missteps in international relationships may have lasting effects on many levels.

San Diego State University is located minutes away from the US-Mexico border. Local planners have begun to think of the San Diego-Tijuana border region as a "twin cities" area (SANDAG, 2003). The region is the tenth largest urban community in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) partner countries (SANDAG, 2003). Issues of cross national security, criminal justice, economic mobility, transportation, and environmental preservation are the subjects of policy and academic research in the region (Papademetriou, 2003; Center for US-Mexican Studies, <http://www.usmex.ucsd.edu/justice/keys.html>). The social work communities on both sides of the border are presently dealing with binational foster care issues, trafficking of women and children, homeless youth from Mexico, families divided by the border and stressed by the separation, substance abuse, and other social ills associated with the unique nature of the border. Many students report that the issues associated with being

part of a border community are the primary focus of the work at the field placements.

In summary, faculty and community practitioners need to have an in-depth knowledge of the historical precedents that may influence relationships, current political and economic pressures, and the mutual needs and concerns that infuse the border region. Developing and maintaining binational dialogues that involve students, academics and practitioners is one useful avenue for understanding border issues, and recognizing how to work with systems on both sides of the border.

### **Skills for International Social Work**

#### **Social Work Curricula**

The growing pressure to internationalize the social work curriculum reflects the realities of technology and the need for enhanced competencies. Nagy and Falk (2000) suggest that a minimum requirement for social workers in the 21st century is to "be prepared to work locally in an increasingly multi-cultural society" (p. 57). The problems that once were seen by social work as local – that is, confined by a geographic or political boundary – are now recognized as "the interconnectedness of humanity" (Sewpaul, 2001). As the events and challenges around the world are accessed with increasing speed and ease, the social work curriculum must be ready to respond. "It is hard to imagine a social work career in the 21st century that will not bring the practitioner into periodic contact with situations that require knowledge beyond the borders of one's own country," (Healy, 2001, p. 217).

The degree to which international activity has been included in schools of social work is unclear. A survey of undergraduate social work education programs in the United States revealed that among respondents (44% of those sampled), 19% had a specific curriculum objective to include international content in social work courses (Johnson, 1996). Although the author reported that the interest in international issues was clearly present (over one-third had students in field placements outside the US), interest was rated higher by faculty than

by students. This may reflect the need for increased faculty involvement and competencies that can then stimulate student enthusiasm. In addition, the study did not include graduate programs, and the push for internationalization has increased since the 1996 study. A 2004 survey of both BSW and MSW programs in the US (Mathiesen, 2004) revealed that approximately 37% of BSW programs and nearly 47% of MSW programs that responded either currently offered international field placements at their schools, or the placements were in progress.

#### **Faculty Competence**

Faculty development is an important strategy for creating a globalized social work curriculum (Healy, 2002). Healey cited the lack of competent faculty as a "particularly potent barrier" in an infusion/internationalization model of social work education (2002, p. 7). There is evidence that this has been the case in other countries. Lack of faculty competence was identified in a 52-country study as one of the major obstacles to effective global education in general (Tye, 1999). Faculty leadership is essential to create the opportunities and enthusiasm needed to stimulate student participation.

Language acquisition is an essential skill for working in binational settings, and social work students and faculty learning and practicing together can be a powerful motivator. Bilingual individuals can serve as mentors for those who wish to enhance their skills, and the result will be increased numbers of social workers who are able to work effectively internationally.

In summary, faculty competence may be a critical pathway to increasing the number of culturally competent social work practitioners who are prepared to meet the challenges of a global social work landscape. Gaining experience in other countries and cultures can augment the ability of social work faculty, students and practitioners to be effective and responsible agents of change. Faculty may enhance their own competencies and engage in an international leadership role by providing binational continuing education opportunities for practitioners in a border community.

#### **International Field Placements: Bridging Bi-national Professional Paradigms**

Education and professional status may not have the same status in different cultures/countries. For example, social work baccalaureate education in Mexico and the US is not equivalent. There is very little graduate education, specifically in social work, in Mexico, and individuals with a "licenciatura" do much of the work. While the undergraduate Mexican "licenciatura" is not as advanced as a US Master's degree, it may provide more in-depth knowledge and skills than BSW programs in the US.

Despite differences in educational degrees in social work, there are a number of similarities. Field education is a fundamental component of social work throughout the world (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002, p. 218), and has been described as "nearly universal" in beginning levels of social work education (Skolnik, Wayne, & Raski, 1999, p. 473). This is less true in advanced social work education. The results of a survey of schools outside the US reveal that only 39% of the master's level and 3% of doctoral programs have practicum requirements, while 95% of the undergraduate programs do (Skolnik et al., 1999). In contrast, all American social work programs, graduate and undergraduate, require field education. International exchanges must consider the local resources available when mapping out supervision requirements to avoid creating obstacles that may be difficult to overcome.

Regarding internships in Mexico, Krajewski-Jaime and colleagues (1996) proposed a developmental model for building inter-cultural sensitivity in undergraduate social work students. They reported that over a four-year period, 80 percent of the student participants in a seven-week practicum in Mexico City met the primary program goal of "beginning the lifelong process which leads to cultural competence" (Krajewski-Jaime, Brown, Ziefert, & Kaufman, 1996, p. 26). The lifelong learning goal proposed by these authors is consistent with the views of other researchers who believe that continuing education must play a part

in social work on a global level, and, in fact, "continuing education may well spearhead practice, education, and research in its quest to internationalize curricular content" (Traub-Werner, 2000, p. 7)

Healy (2002) described the role of field instructors as "key in linking international knowledge to professional practice and action" (p. 8). Yet high quality field instructors are in short supply (Skolnik et al., 1999). This is a critical role to be filled by practitioners who are dedicated to continuing education. Just as full implementation of international content in social work curricula has been hampered by the lack of faculty expertise, international internships are in need of carefully conceptualized approaches and well-trained and culturally competent field instructors.

#### **Values in International Social Work: The Search for Reciprocity**

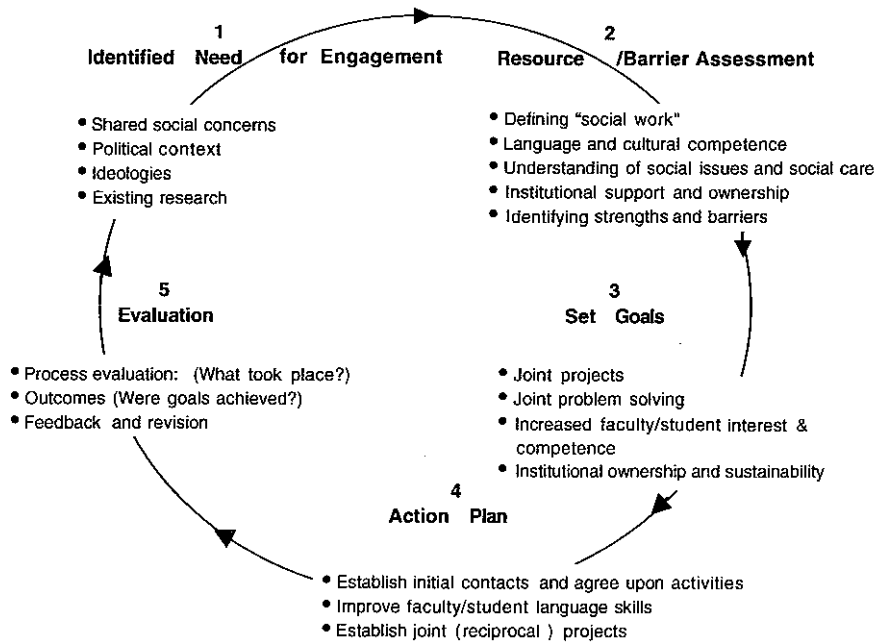
As the number of international exchanges increases, it is important that the nature of the exchange is mutually beneficial. Caragata and Sanchez (2002) note that the post-World War II export of social work knowledge to developing countries, with an emphasis on individual clinical treatment, has not always translated well in other cultures. In their historical review of north-south international issues, they concluded that a positive gradual change occurred as North American social workers moved away from solely delivering their knowledge to others in Latin America, to learning from other countries' experiences. However, results from their survey of US and Canadian schools of social work revealed that most international efforts continue to focus on either exporting North American know-how or training North American students in developing countries. "While there are schools which do carry out exchanges south-north and north-south, there remains a lack of full reciprocity" (Carataga & Sanchez, 2002, p. 233). A recent survey of all accredited schools of social work in the US asked respondents to rank order a list of facilitating factors for developing and maintaining international placements. "Mutual goal set-

ting between nations" ranked first more often than any other (Mathiesen, 2004).

In a border region the interface of different paradigms and different definitions of social work roles requires careful exploration prior to prematurely jumping into exchanges following a North American social work paradigm. Regarding Mexico in particular, Mexican educators have raised questions as to the benefits of traditional student exchanges (Statland de Lopez, 1993). One international social work exchange between Mexico and Georgia found that orientation to the country, combined with other experiential learning activities, helped to increase cultural and language competence (Boyle, Nackerud, Kilpatrick, 1999, p. 211). While these results are evidence of success for the guest country, they leave unanswered the question of the benefit to the host country. More importantly, do such exchanges allow the two parties to understand each other well enough to seek true reciprocity and help each other to identify shared solutions?

Mathiesen and Lager's model (2003) for developing international student exchanges specifically addressed the need reciprocity and for both host country and guest to communicate their goals at each step in the process. Consideration of costs and gains for both parties helps to avoid the one-sided view (centered on student needs) that often characterizes the benefits of internships. This model is based on an innovative 20-year partnership between private agencies and the Florida legislature whereby volunteer missions are funded to improve environmental, social and economic conditions in the Caribbean nations and Central America (Florida Association of Volunteer Agencies for Caribbean Action [FAVACA], 2003). FAVACA's skilled volunteers are seen as partners with the requesting country. The ultimate goal is to provide ongoing assistance to the host country for an indefinite period of time until the project is permanently sustained and further assistance is no longer needed. Mathiesen and Lager's model explicitly includes reciprocity as a key factor, and emphasizes the need for effective communication. "When these processes break

Figure 1. Developmental Model of International Engagement



down, or are untended over time, the results may be misattributed to 'cultural factors' or seen as evidence that international work is too difficult to sustain" (Mathiesen & Lager, 2003, p. 5).

### The Model and a Case Study

Community connection is a critical need in the California-Mexico border region, one of the busiest in the world. Social problems are associated with this travel. For example, individuals crossing the border frequently encounter gaps in needed services related to public health and social service needs. What is easily available in one country may not be accessible in the other. Immigration status may present additional barriers by precluding eligibility for needed services, preventing gainful employment, and, for those immigrants who are parents, interfering with child custody. The lack of collaboration between practitioners and agencies on both sides of the border can cause additional stress to those migrating across the border. When individuals encounter problems in the opposing country,

they may not be able to find professionals who are sensitive to and willing to respond to their needs. The case study presented describes the initial stages in the process of developing a meaningful, reciprocal engagement between a university social work program and social worker practitioners in two countries, and presents a model that incorporates continuing education, faculty and student development.

The mission statements of the university and the school of social work include attention to international issues. The university has developed some collaborative relationships in other disciplines in border cities, yet as this project began, the institutionalized collaborations between the practice community and the school of social work were underdeveloped.

A task group of social work faculty from the US University interested both in local border issues and in the broader issues pertaining to international social work began meeting to identify ways to engage the university social work community with

counterparts in Mexico. Seeking a systematic approach to the collaboration, the task group developed a model for engaging in international partnerships that depicts the developmental nature of engagement with another culture, and the steps involved. The model is presented in Figure 1.

The following principles were applied to each step in the engagement process: (a) Recognition that many concerns about family well-being are shared in both countries. By building on the strengths of systems on each side of the border, solutions to social problems impacting families can be identified. (b) Any cross-border engagement must reflect collaboration among participants and reciprocity in the sharing of knowledge and skills. (c) Cultural competence is a primary goal. Faculty and students need to engage in ongoing efforts to improve their cultural and linguistic skills. With these principles in mind, we began the process outlined in the model. Figure 2 provides a summary of the task group's activities to date. The way in which we applied the model follows.

### **1. Identified Need for Engagement**

Several faculty members identified the need to engage their Mexican counterparts through their work with students and families in the border community. The task group first identified activities that had been taking place. The Center for Latin American Studies, a cross-disciplinary center at the university, was engaged in a number of projects, including some attempts to provide students with hands-on experience with community agencies in the border city. Yet there were inadequate institutional collaborations between the Mexican social work community and the school of social work. One social work faculty member had been working on a volunteer basis for more than 20 years with a university in Mexico, and this enabled the group to identify key contacts rapidly. Based on existing relationships and building on faculty expertise, exploratory meetings were arranged between social workers in Tijuana and members of the university social work task group. The meetings were reciprocal, and both groups of social workers made efforts to meet each other on their "turf," thus initiating the discussion of values.

### **2. Resource/Barrier Assessment**

This step of the model was focused on knowledge acquisition. From the beginning of the project, Mexican and US practitioners were aware of the need to develop a mutual orientation to social service systems, and to translate different education and credentialing standards. In the initial meetings, mutual interests in social issues and training needs were explored. Both groups of social workers concluded that they had mutual interests in the social need areas of child maltreatment, child sexual abuse, family violence, treatment of the chronically mentally ill, and stressors related to migration and immigration. They also recognized that differences in the ways that the two societies handle these social issues needed to be explored and understood by social workers on both sides of the border with a goal of continuing professional education. Plans were made to carry out visits on both sides of the border, with a focus on areas identified as important to all participants.

### **3. Goals Established**

As a result of the initial discussions, a beginning action plan was drafted and agreed upon by the members of the US and the Mexico groups. The action plan included specific activities and dates, along with setting goals for the collaboration. Some of the mutual goals that were identified included: (a) Improving language and cultural skills; (b) Improving social workers' understanding of social service systems, needs, and gaps on both sides of the border; (c) Establishing joint training and continuing professional education opportunities; (d) Identifying joint research and education projects; (e) Creating several joint border conferences to extend the reach of the partnership and to explore border issues. These goals were considered to be mutually beneficial, according to the principles agreed upon: they built on each nation's strengths and addressed family issues broadly, reflected reciprocity of effort and an inherent focus on gaining cultural competence. The goals are, by necessity, short to mid-term goals; the overarching goals are to establish meaningful dialogue, cross-national research, and ongoing educational exchanges. Our approach to goal setting is consistent with the pre-

**Figure 2. Developmental Model of International Engagement**

Step	Variables	Current Efforts
1. Identified Need For Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social problems are identified and shared understanding of problems exists.</li> <li>2. Political context between the countries is such that engagement is possible.</li> <li>3. Existing research offers insight into the problems or suggests avenues for investigation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identified interested faculty.</li> <li>2. Identified activities that were already in place.</li> <li>3. Identified interest at the institutional level.</li> <li>4. Initiated preliminary contacts based on initial relationships.</li> </ol>
2. Resource/Barrier Assessment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Articulating what social work means in each country, including who does it, level of training and regulation, and status.</li> <li>2. Assess the ability of faculty and students to communicate both linguistically and culturally.</li> <li>3. Gain understanding of the differences in how social problems are defined and who is seen as responsible for social care. Identify ideological and values barriers.</li> <li>4. Identify sources of institutional and financial support.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Orientation to other country—issues of language, identifying counterparts, understanding social service systems, social work education.</li> <li>2. Identify areas of mutual interest.</li> <li>3. Cross-border exchanges.</li> <li>4. Tentative plan of activities (visits, conferences, shared training.)</li> </ol>
3. Set Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop joint problem solving.</li> <li>2. Improve faculty and student interest and competence.</li> <li>3. Develop and sustain institutional ownership and sustainability.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve language and cultural skills.</li> <li>2. Develop a program that meets needs and interests on both sides of the border.</li> <li>3. Develop an understanding of systems of care, education, credentialing, in order to enhance program development.</li> </ol>
4. Action Plan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish initial contacts and agree upon activities.</li> <li>2. Improve faculty and student language and cultural skills.</li> <li>3. Define joint projects with clear goals &amp; objectives, taking into account values, culture and ideology.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developed a “wish list” of shared activities.</li> <li>2. Identified financial support and carried out some of the exchanges.</li> <li>3. Developed training focused on identified interests.</li> <li>4. Participated in a comprehensive program with UABCS in La Paz.</li> <li>5. Joint coordination of a bi-national social work conference.</li> <li>6. Anticipated identification of a project based on the results of the bi-national conference.</li> </ol>
5. Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Process evaluation: Document what occurred.</li> <li>2. Outcomes evaluation: How well have the goals set for each project and for the overall engagement been met?</li> <li>3. Provide feedback to key stakeholders and make changes suggested by the evaluation.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Document current activities.</li> <li>2. Feedback sessions among key stakeholders.</li> <li>3. Continued identification of shared goals and outcomes.</li> </ol>



vious steps, and utilizes the information from the earlier parts of the process to assure that the goals are grounded in the realities identified by social workers on both sides of the border. The goal setting process was essentially a discussion of the values that would guide the projects.

#### **4. Action Plan**

The first activity planned and carried out was a general orientation to social service agencies in both countries. In this phase, skill development was the focus. Faculty, students and professionals on both sides of the border acquired new abilities to engage internationally and form new alliances. Social workers and students from Mexico visited several health and social service organizations in the US, accompanied by students and faculty from the university. These agencies, chosen by the Mexican social workers, included a center for child abuse within a major children's hospital and a comprehensive community services agency. Presentations in English and Spanish were made at each location, including information about child victim witness protocols, trauma counseling, and family support. Representatives explained how the programs were funded, the range of employees and the scope of their jobs, and the populations served. Weeks later, social workers, faculty and students from the university area visited Mexican social service agencies and received information about how services were structured and funded. The agencies included an adult mental health clinic, a child abuse shelter, domestic violence treatment program, and a program for immigrant women. Social workers on both sides of the border shared their challenges and successes in key program areas. Even though the size of the group was large, the Mexican agencies arranged for access and informative views of services.

Another action agreed upon was to initiate steps toward international student exchanges. Discussions of student placements in the Mexican agencies centered on specific issues, such as bilingual skills for the first student groups, and the need to be flexible about field practicum supervision

requirements. The use of graduates from the US program who would be able to relocate in Mexico would facilitate long term planning for supervision. We also explored how the social workers from Mexico would be able to take university courses. Special student status would allow students from Mexico to accrue a limited number of credits toward a graduate degree. Although these activities are still in the planning stage, the articulation of the need and interest is an important first step.

The initial dialogues in Tijuana also led to the involvement of some faculty with an immersion program sponsored by the University's Center for Latin American Studies. This interdisciplinary program included engagement with faculty from a Mexican university and the opportunity to develop joint research projects and student exchanges. This program will be made available to social work faculty and students in subsequent years. Additionally, social work faculty will have the opportunity to teach in a Mexican university through this program.

Finally, a conference that focused on continuing education for practitioners in Mexico and cultural development for students was created. The "binational encounter" was conducted to identify and discuss issues that impact US and Mexican students, faculty and practitioners in the "twin cities" region. The key principles that guided all prior planning steps were also addressed in this activity. The format for the conference and the topics to be discussed were decided upon collaboratively, and social workers from both communities offered input and resources. Practitioners from the US were offered Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for attending, an important way to legitimize the conference. Several general topics (e.g. child protection and mental health service delivery) were agreed upon, and representatives from each country chose the experts to lead the discussions. The experts introduced the topic from their country's perspective and summarized current definitions of the issues, what is known about "best practices," funding and other challenges. The experts facilitated discussions with students, educators and practi-

tioners from both countries. Bilingual students and faculty served as facilitators and recorders for the topic areas and the results will be disseminated in both English and Spanish.

#### **5. Evaluation**

The evaluation of these activities included feedback from key stakeholders on both sides of the border. After each of the activities a debriefing was conducted, and the feedback used to plan future activities and improve those activities that were ongoing. Over time, mutually agreed-upon outcomes of the engagement will be refined. The collaborative group anticipates that programs such as the immersion program and any training activities will use feedback and participant evaluations for the purpose of improvement and expansion.

One indicator of the success of the initial activities is the amount of interest generated. More than 70 individuals (64 students) seized upon the opportunity to visit the Mexican agencies. The social workers from Mexico who visited the US endured the protracted wait lines at the border that are part of the post- 9/11 era to join the members of the partnership.

The reports from the conference will also serve as measures of the degree to which participants are ready to complete the circle of the model. American and Mexican practitioners filled the conference room in Mexico, eager to engage in the dialogue. It is anticipated that ideas for programs and services, along with plans for funding cross-national research into the selected topics will emerge from this process, a welcome and needed avenue for both countries. Evaluation of the content and process of goal setting will serve as a springboard to new areas of engagement, and a new cycle of collaboration will begin.

#### **Discussion: Implications for Social Work**

The goal of establishing ongoing binational communication was achieved in this project. Over one hundred and fifty individuals on both sides of the border took part in either the cultural exchanges

or the binational encounter. Faculty and practitioners from the US and Mexico were involved as experts in leading discussions about crucial social issues that affect both countries. Many students that participated in the exchanges have reported increased interest in international social work, and seven social work students will be attending a language immersion and cultural exchange program in another area of Mexico this summer. Others report that they will be seeking international jobs when they graduate. The resulting ties with the Center for Latin American Studies indicates that organizational connections are increasing as a result of reaching out to our colleagues at the border and within our university and community. The emerging university-community partnership described has demonstrated that social workers on both sides of the border are hungry for contact with each other and want to build stronger ties. Part of that desire is based on the recognition that many of the issues identified know no border. Using a developmental perspective, the processes of dialogue (identifying the need for engagement and assessing resources and barriers) and partnership (setting goals, establishing an action plan and evaluating efforts) were begun. Issues regarding the need for faculty expertise, the process of developing international field placements and the critical nature of reciprocity were incorporated into this perspective. Areas of binational engagement that remain are continuing faculty development in terms of language, and infusion of international content into the social work curriculum. It is expected that as more faculty gain the skills and knowledge of working internationally, international content will be infused more frequently into all courses. Several faculty members have expressed interest in teaching specific international courses in the curriculum.

Developing systems to enhance international service efficiency and effectiveness requires an engagement process that is sensitive to the range of expectations that stakeholders may have, based on prior positive and negative experiences. Our experi-

ence made it clear that engagement must take place within an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness: a true partnership.

Mutual goals, flexible attitudes, and a strengths-based approach have been used in all interactions. These are aspects of Mathiesen and Lager's model (2003) for developing and maintaining international student exchanges, which may be more fully applied as the international work develops and internships are the focus. We argue that many international projects are begun without sufficient preparation and without full consideration of the long lasting impact of missteps.

In addition to recognizing obvious differences of language and culture, in order to engage professionals in another country it is necessary to understand what social work is in that country, who practices it, how they are trained, and what the society expects of social services. Clearly this kind of understanding requires ongoing dialogue and recognition that each of the social service systems needs to be understood and respected in its own

right. The human tendency to critique that which is different needs to be resisted so that the strengths, challenges, successes and difficulties of each system can be identified. The purpose of this understanding, from our experience, should be to identify ways to provide bridges and connections between the systems so that vulnerable individuals and families can be best served.

Learning from each other is fundamental to the approach assumed by the collaborative group. Caragata and Sanchez's (2002) study revealed the need to broaden the exposure to valuable international exchanges with the "simple and expedient methods for sharing these learnings, such as through the use of seminars and colloquia and the involvement of those with international experience in segments of relevant courses" (p. 234). Increasing the number of staff, faculty, students and community practitioners that are exposed to and influenced by the work of other societies is one of the primary goals of the project, and direct participation should not be seen as the only means to that end.

**References:**

- Boyle, D.P., Nackerud, L., & Kilpatrick, A. (1999). The road less traveled: Cross-cultural, international experiential learning. *International Social Work*, 42(2), 201-214.
- Caragata, L., & Sanchez, M. (2002). Globalization and global need: New imperatives for expanding international social work education in North America. *International Social Work*, 45(2), 217-238.
- Cook, D., Bond, A.F., Jones, P., & Greif, G.L. (2002). The Social Work Outreach Service within a school of social work: A new model of collaboration with the community. *Journal of Community Practice*, 10(1), 17-31.
- Estes, R. (Ed.). (1992). *Internationalizing social work education: A guide to resources for a new century*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. Retrieved August 26, 2003 from: <http://www.caster.ssw.upenn.edu/~restes.intl.html>
- Florida Association of Voluntary Agencies for Caribbean Action (FAVACA) (2003). FAVACA: A unique partnership with the Caribbean. Retrieved August 26, 2003 at: <http://www.favaca.org>
- Green, J.W. (1999). *Cultural awareness in the human services: A multi-ethnic approach* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Healy, L.M. (2001). *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Healy, L.M. (2002). Internationalizing social work curriculum in the twenty-first century. *Electronic Journal of Social Work*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Hokenstad, M.C., Khinduka, S.K., & Midgley, J. (1992). The world of international social work. In M.C. Hokenstad, S.K. Khinduka and J. Midgley (Eds.), *Profiles in International Social Work* (pp. 1-10). Washington, D.C.: NASW Press.
- Huntington, S.P. (2004). The Hispanic challenge. *Foreign Policy*, March/April, 30-45.
- Johnson, H.W. (1996). International activity in undergraduate social work education in the United States. *International Social Work*, 39(2), 189-199.
- Krajewski-Jaime, E.R., Brown, K.S., Ziefert, M., & Kaufman, E. (1996). Utilizing international clinical practice to build inter-cultural sensitivity in social work students. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 4(2), 15-29.
- Lechner, F. (2003). Globalization issues: What is globalization? Retrieved August 13, 2003 from the Globalization Website, <http://www.emory.edu/SOC/globalization/issues01.html>
- Lum, D. (2003). *Culturally competent practice: A framework for understanding diverse groups and justice issues* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Mathiesen, S.G. (2004). International involvement for BSW and MSW programs in the United States. Presentation to the National Association of Deans and Directors Annual Meeting, CSWE Annual Program Meeting, Anaheim, CA.
- Mathiesen, S.G., & Lager, P. (2003). Developing and maintaining international student exchanges. Paper presented to the 6th Biennial Conference of Caribbean and International Social Work Educators.
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2001). *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. Retrieved August 26, 2003 from [www.naswdc.org/pubs/standards/cultural.htm](http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/standards/cultural.htm).
- Nagy, G., & Falk, D. (2000). Dilemmas in international and cross-cultural social work. *International Social Work*, 43(1), p. 49-60.
- Papademetriou, D. (2002). Converging realities of the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Retrieved August 13, 2003 from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=35>, pp.1-4.
- Porter, K. (2003). Globalization issues: globalization: What is it? Retrieved August 13, 2003 from <http://globalization.about.com/cs/whatisit/a/whatisit.htm>
- Rai, G.S. (2002). Meeting the educational needs of international students: A perspective from U.S. schools. *International Social Work*, 45(1), 21-33.
- Rosenthal, S.J. (2000). Continuing education across boundaries: Exploring the international exchange of social work knowledge and practices (preface). *Professional Development*, 3(3), 5-6.
- SANDAG (2003). Binational coordination in the Southern California-Northern Baja California region. Retrieved August 13, 2003 from: <http://www.sandag.org/index.asp?classid=19&fuseaction=home.classhome>
- Sanders, D., & Pedersen, P. (1984). Introduction. In D. Sanders & P. Pedersen (Eds.). *Education for international social welfare* (pp. xi-xxvi). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Sewpaul, V. (2001). Keynote closing plenary speech, 5th Biennial Conference of Caribbean and International Social Work Educators, Nassau, Bahamas, August 9, 2001.
- Skolnik, L., Wayne, J., & Raskin, M.S. (1999). A worldwide view of field education structures and curricula. *International Social Work*, 42(4), 471-483.
- Statland de Lopez, R. (1993). Mexican campuses plan for stepped-up international role. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 39, A38.
- Traub-Werner, B. (2000). Continuing education across boundaries: Exploring the international exchange of social work knowledge and practices. *Professional Development*, 3(3), 6-8.
- Tye, K.A. (1999). Global education: A worldwide movement. *Issues in Global Education: Newsletter of the American Forum for Global Education* (Issue 150). Retrieved August 26, 2003 at: <http://www.globaled.org/issues/150/a.html>