

SERIES ON ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION PROPOSAL

Submitted by School of Social Work

Project Team Members

The Project will be composed of three core team members. These members will carry out the integrative functions of the project. In addition, the core members will negotiate with individual faculty members of the School of Social Work to prepare individual materials to be used in the final product of the project.

Core Team Members:

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Project Overview

The School of Social Work allows students the option of taking test-out examinations related to knowledge and skill content in the Foundation-level courses in the Master's of Social Work program. These test-out examinations allow the School to determine whether incoming students have acquired a base of knowledge and skills that would support moving directly into more advanced academic work in the areas covered by the Foundation-level test-out examinations.

This project would support the redesign of four test-out examinations to make them deliverable via technological means alone. In addition, the test-outs would be reviewed for content and format so that they could be used with all students entering the Regular, 2-year graduate program in Social Work as a pre-post test for acquisition of Foundation knowledge and skills.

The overall outcome for the project would be a tool that could serve a dual purpose in providing pre/post coursework data to be used in the continual renewal of Foundation area courses, and, in providing accurate assessment of students who have exceptionally acquired levels of knowledge and skills in given areas of the MSW program Foundation courses. This would benefit all students taking the Foundation courses and provide for accurate advanced placement for exceptional students entering the program.

Current Challenge

The extant test-out examination for Foundation knowledge and skills are not fully deliverable in technological format. In addition, there is extreme variation in format across the existing test-out examinations and, for some Foundation level courses, there is no extant test-out examination. The lack of standardized format and examination process leaves both incoming students and faculty with a confusing

situation that prevents appropriate use of the test-out process to ensure that the exceptional student is able to take advanced courses when these will provide a better educational experience.

There are no formal pre/post test measures of Foundation level knowledge and skills that can be applied across all students in the full-time program. This means that course renewal and curriculum renewal is dependent solely upon post-learning measures, which while helpful, do not allow faculty to refine course content and process based on identified areas in which knowledge and skill development may not be occurring.

The faculty of the School has recognized that better pre/post coursework evaluation of knowledge acquisition and skill development is a necessary part of maintaining a high quality graduate program. The School recently adopted a new curricular structure to enhance the education students receive in the Master of Social Work program. During Fall 2005, new and/or fully revised courses will be added to the curriculum in both Foundation and Concentration levels. A new method of pre/post test of Foundation level courses that would also allow for test-out by exceptionally prepared incoming students would enhance the learning experience of all students under the new curricular structure.

Proposed Approach

The core project members will work on the development of an integrated pre/post test instrument for four of the Foundation level courses in the MSW program. This instrument will be designed to be delivered entirely online and to have the capacity for electronic scoring. The core project members will ensure standardization of question format across content areas, randomization of the process of drawing of actual pre/post test examination questions from the standardized test banks developed for each content area; and, choice of technologies that support appropriate testing for each content area (e.g., use of film clips as part of pre/post test on professional interaction skills).

Individual faculty members with expertise in each of the Foundation content areas will be provided with monetary incentive to develop the test bank questions for that content area. The core faculty of the Project will work consultatively with the individual faculty who do the test bank development. This work will take place in Fall 2005 semester and test banks for each Foundation area will be ready by January 1, 2006.

In Winter semester 2006, core Project members will work on the creation of the integrated pre/post test examination and its formatting for electronic administration and grading. Once this has been designed, the faculty of the School will be asked to set the "test-out" level for pre-test performance by incoming students that will allow them to take advanced content courses in lieu of the Foundation courses.

The final product of the Project will receive a "pilot application" in early May of 2006. Incoming Advanced Standing students will be asked to take the online examination. These students have had Foundation level courses waived because they have a BSW degree and are assumed to have adequate Foundation level knowledge and skills in all areas except research. The expectation would be that these students would achieve a "test-out" level score in each of the content areas except research.

Refinements to the examination will be made, if needed, in late May 2006. The final product will become a required pre-test for all incoming two-year MSW students in August 2006.

Transformation Goals

This Project meets several of the goals of ET@MO for the Series on Academic Transformation grants, even though the product is not related to a specific course design or delivery.

By creating a pre/post testing instrument for knowledge acquisition and skill development in four Foundation level MSW content areas, the Project advances the School of Social Work's ability to accurately assess the learning of students in the program. It also will allow more accurate assessment of the knowledge and skills levels of exceptional incoming students, improving the ability of the School to provide proper placement in the program for these students.

Because the pre/post testing instrument will also have the capacity of identifying students whose incoming levels of knowledge and skill in the profession are already highly developed, the Project meets the goal of addressing the special needs of these students. It is important in this context to note that the students who are expected to do well in the test-out aspect of the examination are non-traditional students who bring work experience and training to the program when they enroll. They are also likely to be high ability students who have been strongly encouraged to return to graduate education by professional colleagues. This addresses the use of technology to meet the needs of such students.

The pre/post examination results will provide data for faculty to use in the constant revision of content and process in the Foundation level courses. This will create a feedback loop in which technology is seen as an integral component of curricular renewal and refinement. In addition, for faculty wishing to engage in scholarly work on MSW curricular issues and knowledge and skill acquisition issues, the Project outcome will be an available data set that can be used over time to provide the basis for scholarly work on curriculum and teaching, as well as on the relationship between technological assessment approaches and curriculum renewal.

By creating a product that will be accessible to students on their own time, the Project enhances the likelihood that faculty will explore the benefits of pervasive technology as part of their teaching repertoire.

Summary

The proposed Project will provide support for the development of a technologically administered and graded pre/post test of competency in content in four Foundation level areas of the MSW program. This examination will also provide a method of test-out from the basic courses in those Foundation areas for exceptional students whose educational needs will be better served by taking more advanced courses in the MSW program.

Individual faculty will be supported in developing the individual content area test banks with assistance from the core Project members to ensure consistent format and adequate representation of the range of knowledge and skills relevant to Foundation level content mastery. The core Project members will then develop the integrated examination including the technological design and implementation choices and run a pilot of the product. This will result in a product that can be put into use with incoming students in Fall 2006.