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# Program Development During Fiscal Crisis: A Community/University Response

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*This article discusses the often difficult and challenging process of setting up a new academic department, especially during a time of budget crisis. Furthermore it examines the role and purpose of the university, the place of so-called applied programs within the university, curriculum development of a new program, racial and cultural diversity at the university, and the overall relevance of the university as a vehicle for addressing community needs. The paper concludes with a discussion on how a Social Work faculty was able to use the university's mission to persuade its leadership into setting up a Social Work Department.*

*Keywords: MSW program development; mission; values & ethics, fiscal crisis*

## Introduction

The development of a new academic program in higher education is both an exciting and a challenging experience. When such a program is introduced in a time of budgetary crisis and political unrest in the academy, the excitement

and challenge escalates. While this is especially the case in California with its energy crisis, layoffs and cutbacks in the computer industry, similar circumstances impact the nation as well.

What we do in this article is to examine how a university responds to an acute community need while at the same time trying to maintain fiscal integrity during a time of budgetary crisis. We believe this article has relevance in that it addresses such issues as the role and purpose of the university, the place of so-called applied programs in the university, university politics, university/community relations, curriculum development, racial and cultural diversity, political influence, accrediting agencies and, ultimately, the overall relevance of the university as a vehicle for addressing community needs.

More specifically, we use the creation of a Master of Social Work degree program (MSW) at California State University East Bay (Formerly California State University Hayward) (CSUEB) and the multiple interactions with public social welfare agencies in its service area as the focus of this paper. As a regional university, CSU East Bay has a mission of serving the needs of its diverse multicultural and multicultural service area populations. On the other hand, within the university there is a tension between so-called "academic purists" and those interested in "applied or professional" programs. This tension is further exacerbated by the continuing demands from service area constituents that the university exists to serve the community.

This analysis reflects the experience of three faculty members assigned the task of delivering an accredited Master of Social Work (MSW) program to a medium-sized state university in northern California. The team consists of one senior faculty member with more than thirty years experience in the system and two junior level faculty members with less experience in academia, but strong backgrounds as social work practitioners. In the pages that follow it will become evident that the delivery of a masters level professional program that effectively serves community needs requires a unique blend of experience that transcends academic and community interests, culture, history, practices, stereotypes, prejudices and customs.

## The Need For MSW Level Social Workers

For more than thirty years members of the faculty in the department of Sociology and Social Services had intermittently proposed the establishment of an MSW program but were always rebuffed for the same reason—costs. The administrative response always revolved around the issue of cost with little discussion of need or service to the community.

In 2001 and 2002, the winds of change began to blow. These winds of change emanated, not from the campus, but from the community, various public social service providers and even the state legislature. Changes in state and federal law and a proliferation of children in foster care helped to produce a tremendous shortage of MSW trained social workers to manage the growth. Representatives from the social work provider community including the National Association of Social Workers, the California Association of Social Workers began to petition the state legislature and local campuses in the CSU to provide relief. A powerful report authored by Assemblywoman Dion Aroner (Aroner, 2002) clearly articulated the acute shortage of MSW level social workers and gave new ammunition to those in the academy who had been pushing for MSW programs for years. County and state social work officials estimate a need of between 6,000 and 14,000 social workers over the next ten years (Aroner, 2002). The MSW degree granting institutions in California simply do not have the capacity to meet this need. Additionally, both the directors of the Alameda County Social Services Agency and the Contra Costa County Department of Employment and Human Services contacted CSU East Bay asking for assistance in the training of MSW level personnel (Jones, 2001). This, coupled with the fact that we are one of the only urban campuses in the CSU without an MSW program, we believe, prompted our president and administration to give the go ahead to move forward with the development of an MSW program at California State University East Bay. The decision to move forward with the development of the MSW program gave an additional strand of life to the University's commitment to partner with communities in its service area to address mutually agreed upon needs.

The idea of need is a two way street. At first glance

it would appear that the university is doing all the work in meeting community needs. A closer look would reveal that because of the community's need and the university being identified as an instrument in meeting this need, constituent groups in the community have actually been placed in a position to make the university move in a manner that internal forces were previously unable to do. Previously, the university administration and faculty leadership turned deaf ears to requests to implement an MSW degree program. Now, with state legislators, community based organizations, and public social service directors demanding that the university take action, resistance began to falter. The university administration announced publicly in the university community that an MSW program was a top priority and, to a lesser but important degree, faculty leadership dropped their objections (Academic Senate, 2002a). The response from the rank and file of the faculty was far less supportive. There was concern by individual faculty members and department chairs that a "win," in terms of the creation of a department of social work, would result in a "loss" of resources (faculty, classes, and students) for other departments. This had to be mediated by administrative staff during the final proposal phase.

### Making a Way Out of No Way: Financial Hard Times for the California State University System

CSUEB is one of the 23 campuses that constitute the largest university system in the world. More than 385,000 students are enrolled statewide in the CSU system. CSU East Bay currently has a student population of 13,240. In 2000, the California State University System sustained a series of deep financial cuts that imperiled its ability to provide services to the growing population of individuals transferring from community colleges and entering the system from high school. The following numbers are the overall student population of CSU East Bay over a five-year period of time:

Table 1

Year	Student population
2000	12,705
2001	13,240
2002	13,876
2003	13,455
2004	13,061

The Chancellor of the State-wide system described the budget situation for 2001-02 as “grim,” reporting that then Governor Gray Davis had approved a list of budget cuts that includes a \$29.5 million funding loss for the CSU. These cuts were equally distributed among all of the campuses and the Chancellor’s Office. In 2002-2003, these cuts were made permanent. The State of California faced a 23.6 billion gap between expenditures and revenues, or 30% overages. Governor Gray Davis made cuts of \$50.4 million in the CSU system. The system lost 1% of its revenue in 2001 and an additional 5% in 2003, this combined with the unfunded increased costs of mandatory services such as employee retirement and health benefits, cut deeply into the financial stability of the University.

In 2003-2004, CSU East Bay experienced a reduction of almost seven million dollars in its budget. Its President, Norma Rees put it this way:

“These cuts seriously erode our capacity to provide access to qualified students. To partially address this shortfall, the CSU has raised tuition by 30 percent this year. Even with this increase, the CSU will have to close its doors this spring to 30,000 new students. The budget language calls for zero enrollment growth at CSU and the University of California for 2004-05... This budget carries a stark message about the future of access at California’s public universities... Reductions in instructional and staff positions will mean fewer classes for students, and could mean it will take longer to complete a degree. University officials are faced with the terrible choice of limiting student access or reducing the quality of the CSU education. This is a choice the state and the university systems should

not have to make...At Cal State East Bay, we may be unable to admit new freshmen in the spring 2004 quarter. We also have convened a faculty layoff committee. Our capacity to serve the state, our students, and our communities has been seriously damaged" (Rees, 2003).

The reductions were smaller in 2005, the University reduction or loss was \$1,700,000. The slope of the financial hard times was improving. The environment and terrain of the California educational systems was affected by both the Enron debacle and the Dot.com bust. The loss of tax income and the increasing cost of state level services and salaries made any kind of growth difficult. Thus the development of a new program in this financial strained environment is really quite an accomplishment.

Despite these financially hard times, the University, while eliminating certain departments, invested in the development of a new social work department. This investment included the transfer of two faculty members from the Sociology and Services department to the new Social Work Department and the funding of four lecturers, as well as the hire of a clerical support person. In addition, new office space, in a space-crunched environment was provided. Then, all of the resources of the University were placed at the disposal of the department to move toward the accreditation process. This "making a way out of no way" process came about as the result of public need, community support, university commitment and persistent internal pressure by key faculty to support the development of a social department geared to address public child welfare and community mental health needs. During 2005, continued support of the University was evident by the addition of two more faculty members.

### A Temporary Response:

#### A Bridge Over Troubled Waters

When the leadership of the local social work community first approached the university for assistance in meeting the need for more MSW-level social workers, they expected that we would be able to respond more quickly than what we informed them we could. In essence we had to admit that

moving the university was akin to turning a battleship in a stormy sea. It would take at least two years, maybe three or four to have an MSW degree program in place and accepting students. With disbelief in their eyes and a bit of frustration in their voices, they wanted to know, in a real sense, what we could do for them in addressing their need now.

After a series of exploratory sessions we developed a strategy focusing on distance-learning technology and the distance education program at California State University at Long Beach. Long Beach agreed to offer their three-year part-time Distance Education MSW program at our Contra Costa campus (University College and Extension Services, 2001). This plan was approved at the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate in October of 2001 (CSUH Senate, 2001). The program was offered in the evenings and on the weekends and was ideally suited for employees of Contra Costa County's Employment and human Services Agency. This served as a transition program, until we implemented both a full-time and year-round (Contra Costa site) MSW program.

It is interesting to note that Long Beach was not the first MSW program approached for assistance in meeting the social work shortage in the State of California. Two other MSW programs geographically closer to our campus were approached before Long Beach, but each declined participation. One, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, expressed concern that an additional program in the area would over-saturate the market. They pointed to their decline in enrollment as evidence of this and expressed this point as if it were fact. When we raised the idea that their enrollment might be declining for other reasons, this put a chill on the conversation and effectively ended negotiations. It was less clear as to why the other campus declined our invitation, but the reason openly cited was workload issues of faculty and inadequate resources (Jones & Rush Woods, 2000).

While on the surface no MSW program in the state was openly hostile toward our effort to establish a new MSW program or to immediately assist the social service community in our service area, there was a backdrop of unease that we all experienced. Unspoken in our presence, but out there in the social work rumor mill was the notion that there was no need

for an additional MSW program and our efforts would create a strain in student recruitment and in competition for field placements. Again, a zero sum mentality resulted in a concern that our "win" would result in their loss (students, resources, placements). In spite of these undercurrents from some of the social work education community, the overall reaction to our efforts from community based agencies and practitioners have been overwhelmingly supportive and cooperative (Jones & Rush Woods, 2000).

### Reach Out And Touch Someone (Surveying the Community)

Not relying completely on the Aroner report or the appeals from the leadership in the local social work community, we conducted a feasibility study to document the need for another MSW program in the San Francisco Bay Area (Jones & Rush Woods, 2000). Such a study is actually a requirement in community assessment (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Our feasibility study was distributed to community based social service agencies in both Alameda and Contra Costa counties, two of the largest areas in the University's service area. Eighty-five percent of the respondents supported the need for additional social work education and, more importantly, a willingness amongst the respondents to support the fieldwork education component of an MSW program by agreeing to supervise students in field placements.

Most importantly, the social work community responded by volunteering to assist in the development of field placements (CSUH Social Work Dept., 2004a). This was important because the opposition from the social work education community focused on a notion that there were not enough field placements or field work supervisors willing to take on additional students. The response was especially enthusiastic from the mental health professional and public child welfare communities who believed that the development of another MSW program as an opportunity to train more MSW level social workers to meet the shortage in the areas of both public child welfare and mental health.

What we discovered is that there is no substitute for

establishing strong relationships with the professional social work community. Through our community advisory board, existing relationships, and a lot of telephone and personal contact work, we were able to uncover valuable resources in newly discovered field placements, field work supervisors willing to take our students, and most importantly a community of professional social workers willing to advise and work with us in developing a program that would benefit the university, the community and the people of our service area.

#### *A More Lasting Plan of Action*

Armed with the favorable results of the community survey, the success of the Long Beach Distance Education MSW Program and the support of the administration, we (the MSW Planning Committee) started the laborious process of developing an MSW proposal, getting university approval and implementing the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation process (CSWE, 2001). In doing so we began the dual process of treading through two complex bureaucratic processes: the university curricular procedures approval process and the Council on Social Work Education accreditation process.

**The MSW Proposal** – For almost thirty years social work faculty in the Department of Sociology and Social Services have intermittently proposed an MSW program to the CSU East Bay administration but had always been turned down. The reason for refusal was always the same: “An MSW program was just too expensive.” This latest proposal drew a different reaction. What was the reaction and why?

#### *The CSUH Mission Statement Comes Alive*

Almost all institutions have a set of guiding principals. Such is the case with the CSU East Bay. These guiding principles are most commonly posed in the mission statement of the university. In the case of California State University East Bay the mission statement reads:

Cal State East Bay is committed to educational excellence for a diverse society. Encouraging and advancing learning is our primary mission... This purpose is achieved mainly by providing

instruction for undergraduate and graduate students in the liberal arts and sciences and the professions, including business and teacher education. The university is also a social and cultural center for public enrichment. In partnership with surrounding communities, the university helps identify and address issues of importance to the region... The Hayward campus serves the higher education needs of the people of California, especially those in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Upper division and graduate instruction is also offered at the university's Concord campus. Students at Cal State East Bay increasingly reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of California and the Bay Area. Many students enroll part-time and most are employed. Many transfer from other institutions or resume their education after lengthy interruptions. The university also serves international students, who add to the heterogeneity of the Hayward campus' growing number of resident students, and contribute to education for the global society... We welcome the great variety of students on our campuses both as a strength and an opportunity. The university is dedicated to providing an equitable education within a nurturing environment for all its students. Flexible scheduling, advising, and support programs help fulfill this objective. .... The university is committed to relatively small class size and year-round operation. Its students benefit from close contact with faculty and staff and convenient access to current technology, services, and library materials. (CSUH Mission Statement, retrieved 11/28/2004)

While university administrators, some faculty leaders and those looking to take advantage of university services pay attention to mission statements, most of us tend to dismiss them as lofty slogans useful in attracting funding or at commencement exercises. In actual practice however, the mission

statement of a university can be a valuable document. It is a statement of what the university stands for, i.e., what it plans to do with its resources and what it has to offer to students, faculty and its various communities of interest.

Our University mission statement calls for several things. It supports educational excellence for a population that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the California and Bay Area population. The mission also calls for a year-round and flexible programming for working students. Finally, it calls for services at both our Hayward and Concord campus sites. Our program then reflects a commitment to these specific principles as well as the social work workforce crisis.

When the social work shortage in the state of California and the Bay Area became apparent, leadership in the social work community turned to the university for assistance. They wanted assistance in training more MSW level social workers and they wanted it in a hurry. From their perspective it seemed logical that a state supported higher education institution should be able to provide relief in this important area. While they came to the right place, what became evident from the beginning was that a gap existed between their expectations and the university's ability to deliver. What relief? In what form should it be delivered? How long should it last and who in the university should deliver the relief? How should it be funded? With all eyes focused on the university, how does it respond?

While the mission of the university is clear in terms of its commitment to respond to the needs of a diverse, multicultural and multiracial society, the method of response, the commitment to respond and the timeliness of the response is often problematic and confusing to outside constituents. Just what does it mean to respond to the needs of a diverse, multicultural and multiracial community? How does a university, one that prides itself as liberal arts focused institution respond to a need that appears to be narrow and professional in nature? How does ones mission and goals statement hold up to such apparently opposing demands? In such a situation how do you move from the expediency of abstraction to the precision of practice?

Given the current state of funding for higher education and the competition for these scarce resources, it could be ex-

pected that the development of a new social work program would not come easy. This was especially the case at California State University East Bay where over the past five years there had been a continuous decline in funding with no end in sight. This, coupled with a generally hostile faculty attitude toward the so-called "applied programs" meant that any effort to establish a new program, especially a social work program would be met with hostility.

In actual fact, because of the leadership of the President, the Provost and Dean of the College of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, this opposition was successfully circumvented. The President has had a vision of the role of the regional university which supercedes a parochial view of liberal arts education. In a recent statement, she reiterated her vision of the University:

*"Regional universities distinguish themselves with applied programs that respond to local needs, an emphasis on workforce preparation, and a commitment to providing higher education that is broadly accessible"* (Reese, retrieved 5/1/2004).

The President stated that she wanted an MSW program, the Provost and the Dean provided resources and encouragement and faculty allies assisted in navigating the MSW proposal through the treacherous waters of myriad academic committees.

The opposition came in two forms. First the fiscal conservatives in faculty leadership argued that an MSW program was too expensive and would take away from the needs of badly under-funded programs already in existence. They argued that in such difficult budget times it was no time to start anything new. Secondly, the so-called academic purists argued that the administration was attempting to turn the university into a trade school. They asserted that proposed MSW program was an illustration that the University was down the slippery slope to oblivion.

In responding to the critics we wrapped ourselves in the university's mission statement, claiming that it was our responsibility as a university to respond to the needs of a diverse, multicultural and multiracial community. It was not

our responsibility to respond only in good times, but in bad times as well. A poor budget year was no excuse to abandon the mission of the university and turn our backs on the community and abdicate our responsibility to it. Additionally, we pointed to the long-term possibility that through grants, outside funding and community training efforts, the MSW program would actually attract funding to the university.

Most importantly, we argued that attempting to cast professional programs as “applied” and “academic” programs as “pure” created a false dichotomy. The social work program rests on the a solid foundation of the liberal arts and, as such, is dependant heavily on history, philosophy, political science, science, ethnic studies and related disciplines (Crimmel, 1993; Howell & Edison, 1985). While attempting to cast us in the light of “applied” and somehow less worthy of being in the academic academy may make good theatre, it hardly passes any measurement of effective critical thinking. Furthermore, we argued that the effective use of these liberal arts skills coupled with applied training increased the probability that our students, many of them from working class backgrounds who were the first in their families to attend college, would find better employment opportunities. While there may be some who come to the university only to think and explore ideas, the vast majority of our students come believing that their attendance will lead to employment (LipmanHearne, 2002).

We were able to overcome the opposition to the MSW program, in part, because:

1. The opposition, while intense, only represented the faculty leadership and it was spread thin on other pressing issues in the university and did not stay focused during the long and tedious process through the various university committees.
2. The support of the President, Provost, Dean and key faculty in the university was a key element in getting the program through the process.
3. The expertise, preparation and tenacity of the MSW planning committee were a key

factor in the overall success of the program.

4. The support of key legislators, including Deon Aroner and the leadership of the social work community was extremely effective;

5. The continuous attachment to the mission of the university was core to the effort. This was most important because it kept us focused. The mission statement was our constant reminder of our purpose and our responsibility to serve the community. Through a community's concrete need of MSW level training, we were able to bring our rather abstract university mission statement alive and use it as a guiding principal as we fought off the opposition and provided support for our community partners.

In the long run we believe our efforts to establish an MSW program at California State University East Bay will be a valuable lesson for both our community partners and the university community. For our community partners, the lesson is that with persistence and patience they can count on the university to respond to their needs. And, for the university community, the lesson has been that mission statements are more than abstractions. They can and should be used to guide and direct the resources of the institution. More importantly, we learned that community partnerships are powerful and can lead to mutual benefits that our community partners do not come to us empty handed, but with valuable resources and that together we are powerful beyond imagination (CSUEB Dept. of Social Work, 2004b).

### Conclusion

As this article is in press, the California State University East Bay MSW Program has 140 first and second year students, six tenure track positions and four staff positions. We have developed both a nine-month and a year-round program. We have developed over 100 field placement opportunities for our students and are working in active collaboration with local universities to ensure that there is regional coordination. Our

first class graduated in June 2005 and we are all quite excited. The composition of our student program reflects the diversity of the East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa counties). Our program reflects the principles stated in the university mission statement:

- Diversity
- Flexibility
- Year-round

We believe the process we traversed and the lessons learned are of value to our colleagues in the social work profession, to university officials and colleagues in other disciplines. We embarked on the development of a new MSW program and in that process, we worked with community partners and to bolster the relevance of California State University East Bay as a useful and relevant state institution. On both charges, we believe we have been successful. We have increased the capacity for MSW level education/training in our service area and, we have significantly added to the relevance of our institution by providing educational and job opportunities for our students.

On another level we have demonstrated how, even during difficult budget times, an institution can change and respond to community needs. This happened, in part because of the expert use of pressure from outside constituents, including legislators, social work community leaders, and citizens groups. It occurred also because of the persistence of a core of social work faculty, using good social work organizing principles, and helping the university to stay focused on its missions and goals statement. Furthermore, this significant accomplishment represents the best in cooperation between the university administration and the faculty, no small feat considering the level of conflict and rancor on many campuses throughout the nation.

Most importantly, we have an MSW program under candidacy because of the faith the social work community in the San Francisco Bay Area demonstrated in the social work faculty at California State University East Bay. One county administrator gave tirelessly in terms of advice and using his connections to assist, but he also gave financially in provid-

ing funds to support students in the program from his agency (Kelly & Jones, 2003). Others volunteered to find fieldwork agencies or become fieldwork supervisors. In addition, still others taught classes in the first two years of the development of the program.

We would be remiss if we did not mention the cooperation, advice and assistance we received from our colleagues in social work programs throughout the state. The sharing of experiences, providing course materials and evaluation plans, and just a spirit of cooperation permeated throughout the state as we struggled forward with the accreditation process. While the CSWE Educational Policy Accreditation Standards have been recently revised (CSWE, 2001), our colleagues, nonetheless, would answer questions and struggle through getting to answers with us.

The program development process, for us, has been like building an airplane in flight. We have the program up and running, we have filed a flight plan, i.e., benchmarks and self-studies, and we are on a great journey with hopes of a smooth landing in our future.

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