

A Global Online Classroom: Teaching International Social Work to Students across Borders

Cindy Davis, University of Tennessee, USA ; Nonie Harris, James Cook University, Australia

Terry Lum, Hong Kong University, Hong Kong; Lambert Engelbrecht, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

Introduction

- Online education is a new trend in higher education, which has significant implications for social work education within the global context.
- The ease of access to the Internet internationally and the development of web-management systems, such as, Blackboard, are creating easy access for faculty and students to interact in an online learning environment.
- A course titled, International Social Work, was taught using an online global classroom with students residing in their home countries of the USA, Hong Kong, South Africa, Mexico and Australia.

Methods

- The course was designed to introduce students to international social work and the theories and perspectives that underpin current thinking and practice in international social work.
- Students explored how historical, environmental, cultural, religious, political and economic factors impact social welfare policies and the delivery of human services in different regions of the world.
- Students engaged in critical thinking and analysis of global social welfare issues including poverty, child welfare, health, issues particular to women and the results of catastrophic events including conflict and natural disaster.
- Students and faculty participated weekly in blogs, a course “coffee shop”, discussion boards, live online class lectures, and critical thinking exercises.

Results

Qualitative data was collected from the weekly blogs and discussion boards and revealed the global course had:

- a positive impact on the students’ views toward international social work,
- an increase in their desire to address international issues in their professional goals, and
- an increase in networking with each other across countries.

Conclusion

- The use of technology presents both challenges and opportunities for global social work education and teaching across borders.
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