

Nominees Response to Question # 1

I am concerned by the lack of indigenous inclusion in the curriculums of some university social work programs. What are your thoughts on this issue? - Kathleen

Richard Gregory, RSW (Nominee – President)

This is a very important issue. Social work programs across the province vary in the quantity and quality of Indigenous content in their programs, and there really is no standard that applies across all programs.

The diploma programs have very specific criteria for Indigenous content that must be in their programs in order for them to be approved programs. As I understand it, the Council on Social Work Education is looking at establishing some standards for university programs as well. I also know that most post-secondary institutions are looking very seriously at how to address the calls to action that came out of the Truth and Reconciliation process. We also now have the Indigenous Social Work Degree out of Blue Quills University. So I do believe there are some positive things happening – is enough – I don't think so. I believe that we still have some social workers who don't understand the impact of colonization or about the processes of decolonization.

One of the goals of ACSW is to work on developing online professional development opportunities for our members. I am hoping that, working with our Indigenous Social Work Committee, we can develop some learning opportunities for our members to enhance their understanding and awareness of Indigenous peoples, their histories, the impact of colonization, and what we need to do to move forward.

Thank you for your question.

Richard Gregory

Ajay Pandhi, MSW, RSW, MA, Q-Med, BA (Nominee – Vice-President)

I am concerned by the lack of indigenous inclusion in the curriculums of some university social work programs. What are your thoughts on this issue?

Thank you Kathleen for your question – it's an important one and touches upon the following recommendation stated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action "10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles: i. providing

sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation. ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates. iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula. iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses. v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems. vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children. vii. Respecting and honoring Treaty relationships”.

I think it is absolutely essential that we have education that is comprehensive, inclusive and reflects the represents all Canadian peoples history – as known by them. Our renewed relationship with CASW allows us now to pressure the federal government in being true to the commitments they made to the electorate in regards to our indigenous people. Provincially also we need to continue to push for greater changes to occur by putting additional pressure on our department of education.

Ajay Pandhi

Cody Murrell, BSW, RSW

I am concerned as well about the lack of indigenous inclusion in the university Social Work programs. Although the programs do a fantastic job in numerous respects, I believe there is room for some improvement in this area.

I believe that It is imperative that Social Workers in Canada have an in-depth understanding of indigenous history, culture and how these relate to the current struggles indigenous people are experiencing. This is essential as indigenous peoples are over-represented in many areas that Social Workers are employed in.

In addition, I believe that Social Work programs should aim to hire more indigenous instructors, better incorporate indigenous experiential learning in the curriculum such as participating in ceremonies (as it is difficult to understand indigenous culture without immersing yourself in it) and have elders evaluate the courses/programs for appropriateness.

As you can perhaps tell, this is an issue I am extremely passionate about!

Cody Murrell

Cardinal Fomradas, MSW, RSW, DCA

I feel that schools of Social Work can play an important role in the reconciliation process. I do feel that all Social Work programs should include mandatory coursework in Indigenous history and the Indigenous perspective. Social Work student need to learn and understand about the

multigenerational impact that colonization has had on this population. Social Work students also need to learn practice strategies for working with this unique and distinct population.

Cardinal Fomradas

Jolene Spies, BSW, RSW

Thanks for the question Kathleen. I agree that this is an area that does need further development. I can only speak to my personal experience in completing my diploma at Red Deer College and my bachelor's degree at the University of Calgary in that there was an Aboriginal focus in respect to history and culturally competent practise. I understand that for accreditation in the social work diploma and social work degree programs in Alberta that they need to have an indigenous content. As I presently sit on the advisory committee for Red Deer College, next semester there will be refocus to the curriculum adding an "Indigenous Perspectives in Social Work" course which will further compliment the indigenous focus. Another piece would be to look further into how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings can impact social work education but also a framework for improved knowledge for all Canadians starting right in the elementary school system and working from there. That said, more needs to be done to address reconciliation and how the voice of Aboriginal people needs to come directly from the people. Not only is it looking at the education curriculum but ensuring that Indigenous people are represented as instructors and facilitators in the education system as well.

Thanks!
Jolene

Enid Martin, MSW, RSW

I received my BSW from the University of Victoria where, I felt that indigenous and non-indigenous courses were integrated into the social work curriculum. In response to your question, I researched other Universities, many of whom offer courses in aboriginal studies.

However, I feel your concern is about the lack of indigenous stories/voices/histories in, specifically, core required courses. As we know, core courses are required learnings whereas electives are choices.

As with other necessary learnings, I do not believe that learning about indigenous stories and histories is an option: it's a moral duty we have as social justice advocates and citizens of Canada.

I feel that the history and stories of indigenous persons need to be a core requirement for social work programs. Indigenous stories are the fibers of Canadian culture and without core

knowledge of indigenous ways, culture, spiritualism and injustices, our education is incomplete and flawed. Thank you for your question, Kathleen. Enid

Timothy Wild, RSW

Hello Kathleen,

Thank you for your question. I share your concern regarding the limited amount of indigenous content in social work education programs. This is particularly troubling in light of the central fact that a significant number of the people we work with in our daily social work practice are indigenous. I see it in my community work. Poverty and social dislocation are intimately linked. Secondly, if we are to truly and authentically implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, we have to have a broad understanding of not only the reconciliation dimension, but also take the time necessary to sit in the emotion of the truth – and this requires both context and understanding. It cannot be an easy process.

I know that schools of social work are trying to increase awareness of aspects of diversity, and profile methods of anti-oppressive practice. This is undoubtedly important. However, it is essential that indigenous content not be blended into a more generic approach to diversity. It must be a central and standalone element of generalist and professional social work education. It is our history, and our future.

Thanks

Timothy Wild, RSW