

**Review of the
*Proposal for an Online Master of Social Work Program at IUPUI:
Advanced Generalist Concentration***

This review provides my observations of and comments in response to an examination of Indiana University School of Social Work's proposal for an online MSW Program with one new concentration in advanced generalist practice.

Overall, I find the proposal easy-to-read and understand. It does a good job of providing the context within which the online advanced generalist curriculum will be delivered, including making evident how this new program is well aligned with the School's mission and the strong faculty support it enjoys.

The School's ability to provide instruction online is likewise well documented and its representations appear credible. The qualifications of the faculty developing the program, particularly their credentials related to the design and implementation of online educational programming, also appear to be strong.

I do have some comments that may be helpful for consideration by the School as they move toward further development of the Advanced Generalist concentration; they include the following:

The proposal asserts the online program will be able to accommodate students with "ability challenges," but this assertion could be better explicated with respect to which challenges will be accommodated and what accommodations will be made. Some examples would be helpful, even if not all ability challenges students may evidence can be anticipated in advance.

The proposal also states that the School plans to offer the online program first within Indiana and possibly adjacent states, with future expansion to a national audience, but it does not provide adequate detail about how orientation, field instruction and other curricular components will be managed for students residing a significant distance (adjacent states and nationally) from IUPUI. If these details have not already been addressed the School is encouraged to do so.

Another observation is that the statement of the Objective (Proposal, p. 3) relates solely to the objective for offering the Program online, with no attention to the Program's other (apparent) objective of adding an Advanced Generalist concentration to the School's curriculum. Attention to this oversight would strengthen the Proposal. Both Objective(s) would seem to be appropriate for inclusion within the Proposal's Program Description, and not just within the Abstract.

In my estimation, the component of this Proposal that could benefit from a more in-depth explanation is the discussion of the advanced generalist philosophy and framework, starting with the "Description of Proposed Curriculum" (Proposal, p. 5). This description of "advanced generalist" appears to reflect social work education's early ideas – two decades

ago -- about this concentration's focus (for example, Shatz, Jenkins, and Sheafor, 1990; Gibbs, 1990), rather than more current conceptualizations (see, for instance, Lavitt, 2009). The description provided is does not appear sufficiently robust to demonstrate that there are fundamental differences between the School's current curricular offerings and the courses and learning experiences required to develop an advanced generalist social worker.

The School is encouraged to provide more information to support the Proposal's implicit position that advanced generalists can be adequately developed by enrollment in two 11-week courses, both of them new additions to the curriculum – particularly since the content of those courses is not provided in the Proposal. In addition, there is limited information in the Proposal about how field practice for this concentration will differ in any substantive way from existing concentrations' field practice offerings. The Proposal should address how Field Instructors for the Advanced Generalist concentration will be selected or trained, the skill sets these Field Instructors will be required to demonstrate to ensure the field experience is truly both advanced and generalist in character, and how the practicum experiences will be structured to provide students with opportunities to develop and practice generalist (rather than specialized) social work skills in these practicum settings.

My other observations about the proposal include the following:

1. The proposal more than adequately demonstrates the School's ability to offer online distance education with highly qualified faculty available to design and implement such programming and in fact this type of offering would be considered cutting edge in social work education.
2. If arguments must be made and supported both for adding the Advanced Generalist concentration to the curriculum AND for offering it as an online course, these arguments should be made and supported separately. The current Proposal could be enhanced to provide a more convincing argument to add the Advanced Generalist concentration.
3. The "rationale" for the program is found in two places (Proposal, p. 2 and p. 10). It may be useful for the reader if the rationale included in the Abstract is a summary of the rationale that appears in the proposal.

Citations

Gibbs, P., Locke, B., Lohman, R. 1990 Paradigm for the Generalist Continuum. *Journal of Social Work Education* 3, 232-243.

Lavitt, M.R. 2009. What is *advanced* in generalist practice? A conceptual discussion. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 29, 461-473.

Shatz, M. S., Jenkins, L. E., Sheafor, B. W. (1990). Milford Redefined: A Model of Initial and Advanced generalist Social Work. *Journal of Social Work Education* 3, 217-228.