Educator Q&A
Online Teaching: Humanizing Immigration
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What pedagogical approach do you take to teaching social work with immigrants and refugees online?

Because human interaction is a central focus of social work, it was initially thought that an online environment would not provide social work students with the ability to develop the knowledge and practice skills they need to work directly with clients. Incorporating interaction activities, however, helps build an optimal learning environment. My approach to teaching an online course on social work practice with immigrants is based on the community of inquiry model (CoI). This model includes the social, cognitive, and teaching presence. *Cognitive learning* refers to the development of meaning that occurs by being exposed to various perspectives during the learning process. Social learning is supported by group interactions and students working with each other to create a sense of belonging. The CoI model supports collaborative learning between students and allows the instructor to develop learning opportunities where students engage in active learning and work with fellow students in small groups. In online courses, students use technology to work together on group tasks and engage in social interaction where learning takes place.

Tell us about your teaching resources.

To create a collaborative space, I use VoiceThread, a highly interactive online discussion tool. Using VoiceThread, students work in groups to identify three images that represent the experiences of immigrants at the micro, mezzo, and macro level. Identifying the images allows students to assess the representation of the issues and experiences of immigrants and refugees. The introduction of VoiceThread changes the way in which students and instructors communicate, allowing online students to upload images and develop a voice recording response. With VoiceThread, students have the capability to view and listen to online presentations created by the instructor and other students. They can comment on the presentation using voice, text, audio file, or video. The VoiceThread assignment engages students in cognitive and social learning; completing the assignment in a group allows students to consider the various perspectives of group members, which is a critical factor in the learning process. Social learning is supported through the group's interaction and students

working with each other. Social presence is thought to facilitate a sense of belonging and to enable positive and satisfying interactions that facilitate retention in learning communities. Therefore, this type of assignment provides opportunities for building community and encourages collaboration among students.

What are your goals in sharing this piece?

I want to help social work educators understand how they can successfully meet the goals of the profession in an online learning environment. Social workers working with immigrant populations must advocate for social justice and protect the human rights of immigrants and refugees. Social work requires that courses exemplify the professional behaviors and values of the profession. Faculty members teaching about social work with immigrants online need to have content knowledge as well as knowledge of various technological requirements and tools to develop innovative learning activities and assignments in an online learning environment. Creating online social work courses that address the competencies of the social work profession requires effective instructional design techniques necessary to master the dimensions of each competency. An online learning environment can effectively facilitate the development of the awareness and skills that social work students need to advocate regarding the issues that immigrants face.

About the Educator

Beverly Araujo Dawson is a professor at the School of Social Work at Adelphi University in New York and program director of the online MSW program. She earned a doctoral degree in social work and psychology from the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on the social determinants of well-being and culturally based protective factors among first and second-generation Latino/a families. Dr. Dawson also studies social work pedagogy in online social work learning environments.