



Social Work Distance Education Program: Challenges and Solutions

Presented by:

Denise A. Longoria, Ph.D., LCSW; Social Work Asst. Professor

María de Lourdes Martínez, Ph.D., MSW.; Director of Field Education

The University of Texas – Pan American



**HETS
BEST PRACTICES
SHOWCASE**
Celebrating Technology Innovation
for Hispanic Success in Higher Education

SOCIAL WORK DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM BRIEF HISTORY AND OVERVIEW



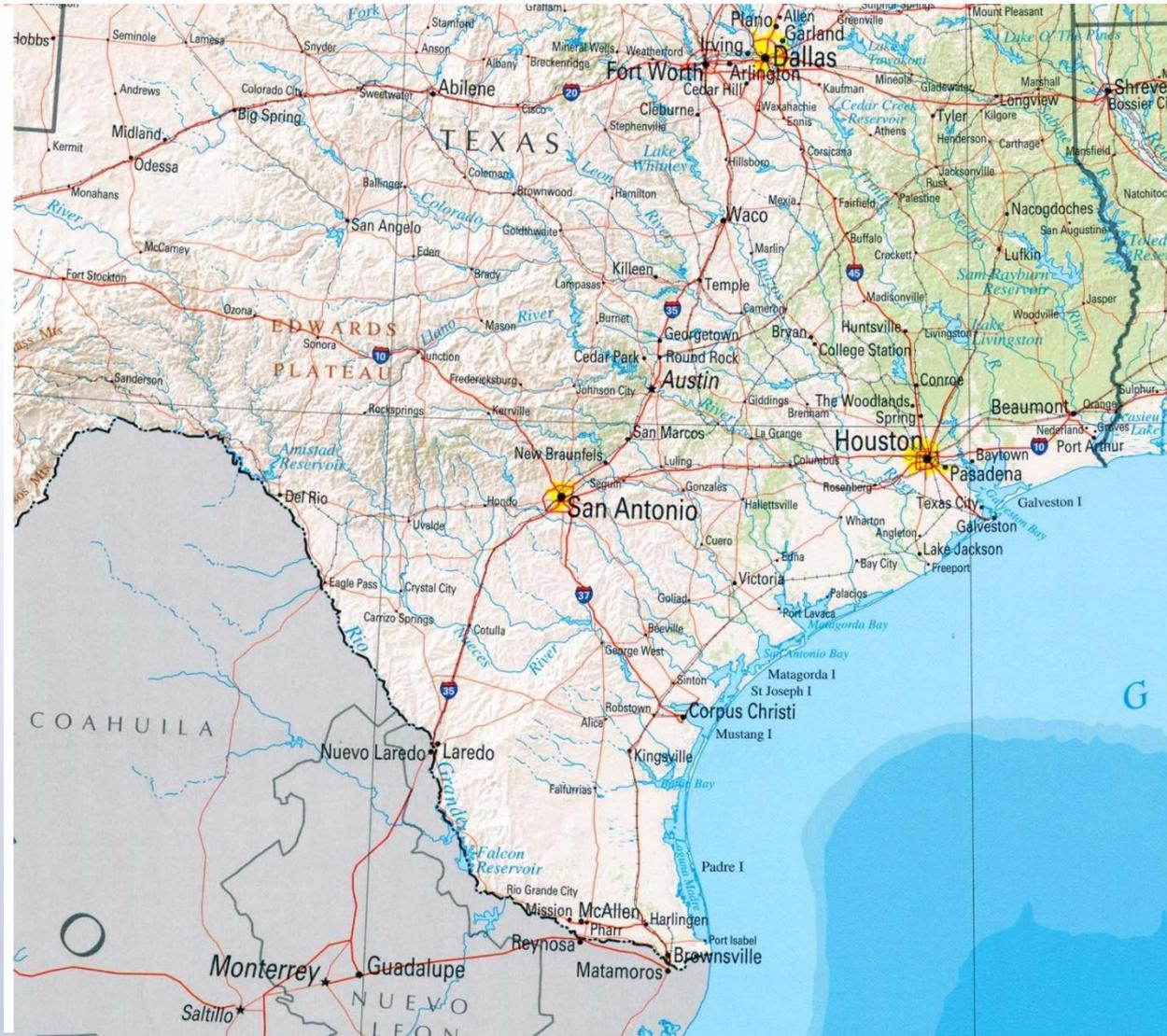
Brief History and Overview

NEEDS

- Only existing BSW program in Laredo announces its pending closure in 2007; program ends in 2010.
- Closest programs are approximately 65 and 150 miles away from Brownsville and Laredo, respectively.



Texas-Mexico Border



Brief History and Overview

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

- Laredo Community College President, Dr. Juan Maldonado extends support to University of Texas -Pan-American; offers to host social work programs.
- First Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) cohort admitted in Fall 2009.



Brief History and Overview

ACTIONS



- In 2009, an agreement between:
 - University of Texas – Pan American
 - Laredo Community College and
 - University of Texas – Brownsville

established the *UTPA Social Work Distance Education Program*

• **Brief History and Overview**

APPROACH

- **Allows both sites to offer Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) degrees via:**
 - **Traditional face-to-face**
 - **Teleconference**
 - **Online formats**



Brief History and Overview

RESULTS

Graduated from the Program	Currently Enrolled
BSW – 3	BSW – 29
MSSW – 14	MSSW – 27



EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES AND FINDING SOLUTIONS



RECRUITMENT

Challenge:

Lack of awareness about the program's existence

Solutions:

- Increased advertisement on campus bulletin boards and newspapers.
- Increased contact with student advisors
- Created field practicum placement for MSSW
Macro student



• BSW & MSSW ADMISSIONS

Academic Year:	BSW	MSSW
2009 – 2010	0	7
2010 – 2011	8	15
2011 – 2012	9	0
2012 – 2013	9	6
2013 – 2014	19	18



STUDENT-FACULTY RELATIONSHIPS

Challenge:

Teaching a profession that focuses on relationships while having minimal face-to-face contact with faculty members

Solutions:

- Initiated face-to-face orientation at distance sites (Included faculty, staff and pre-recorded video clips of additional faculty members)
- Increased use of adjunct faculty members at distance sites
- Full-time faculty travel on alternate weeks (supplement with use of Blackboard)
- Promoted participation at special activities on main campus such as Graduation Luncheon or Graduation Ceremony.



LOGISTICS

Challenge:

Use of teleconferencing can increase likelihood of a poor connection, limited visibility and poor sound.

Solutions:

- Use of proctors at the distance sites
- Increased use of Blackboard to supplement the course; assignments, readings, handouts, etc. can be posted and made accessible to students prior to class meetings.



LOGISTICS (cont'd.)

Challenge:

Conflicts between University policies and needs of a distance education program

Solutions:

- Identify conflicts and possible changes
- Work closely with University administrators to address conflicts
- Explore alternatives to decrease conflicts



FIELD EDUCATION

Challenge:

Field practicum requires 400 – 500 hours in a social work setting where they can be supervised by a social worker. Students must also have a faculty liaison who reviews progress and addresses any problems that arise.

Solutions:

- Increased affiliation agreements with agencies in Laredo and Brownsville
- Faculty member in Laredo assigned to all Laredo students completing practice



PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Challenge:

To develop professional socialization on those new to the profession or already employed in social service organization.

Solutions:

- Promote affiliation to social work student's organizations: SWSA, GSWSA. Meet via Skype or other technology, develop site activities.
- Increase in efforts to have students belong to the local chapter of the National Association of Social Workers in order to increase the sense of belonging in the social work community.



Incorporating Technology in the Distance Education Program



Technology

RESOURCES AVAILABLE



UTPA Teleconference Room

- Conference Room in a round table format
- Whiteboard
- Copy machine
- PC, E-mails, Skype
- Projector
- Wireless microphone for the professor, and desktop microphone for students
- Mounted camera with zoom capacity
- Video Teleconference



TECHNOLOGY

Challenge:

Use of teleconferencing can increase likelihood of a poor connection, limited visibility and poor sound.

Solutions:

- Use of proctors at the distance sites
- Upgrading connection to Fiber Optic which improved videoconference to HD quality
- Increased use of Blackboard to supplement the course; assignments, readings, handouts, etc. can be posted and made accessible to students prior to class meetings.



Library and Writing Center

Challenges

Lack of access to library resources especially on evenings and weekends.

Solutions:

- Chat with the librarian
- E-mail the librarian
- Text the librarian
- Interlibrary loans
- Access to data bases
- Access E-books
- Online Weekend Writing Service
- Skype Tutoring



Conclusion

Social Work Distance Education is an ongoing process

There are still some unresolved challenges, and probably more to come:

- ✓ Having just one monitor in the classroom limits the students possibility to view themselves and their classmates at the distance site.
 - ✓ Adding three more monitors will allow participants, facing either way solve this problem.
- ✓ Active learning is difficult, and some class activities are at times impossible to do.
- ✓ Distance Education poses greater preparation and evaluation demands that justify a lower than average teacher-student ratio that are not always possible.



Any questions?

