

Honoring a Vision: The Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies

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Abstract: The Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies (Buder Center) is a premier graduate degree scholarship program in social work committed to the education of American Indian/Alaska Native MSW students. The Buder Center has made many contributions over the years and continues to grow in exciting and innovative directions. The paper will begin by considering the social, economic, and historical circumstances that make Native-focused training in social work critical to the future of Indian Country. Next, the paper will discuss the founding of the center and pay tribute to the many Native and non-Native elders who contributed to the founding of the Center and the shaping of its vision, mission and goals. The paper will conclude by presenting the progress of the Center over the last 25 years.

Keywords: American Indian/Alaska Native, Indian Country, elders, social work, higher education

As America's Indian communities and tribal governments address social issues in Indian Country, the people bring a vision founded in self-determination, committed to resolution, and grounded in time-honored wisdom. For American Indian/Alaska Native people and their leaders, this century represents a time of collaboration and partnership, an opportunity to replace compromise with consensus. It is also a time when the lessons of the past provide Indian people an avenue to appreciate and incorporate their strengths, wisdom, and abilities to survive into a balanced and harmonious future. To this end, the Buder Center, established in 1990 at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work (Brown School) at Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL), provides a comprehensive program of social work study, which emphasizes social welfare research, leadership training, and preparation for the development and implementation of social policy.

The Buder Center is a premier graduate degree scholarship program in social work committed to the education of American Indian/Alaska Native MSW students. The Center recruits qualified American Indian scholars, provides student support in a demanding course of study, develops curriculum, conducts research, and engages in policy development that directly impacts Indian Country. The Center also prepares future American Indian/Alaska Native leaders to practice in tribal and urban settings, making significant contributions to the health, wellness, and sustained future of Indian Country.

A Case for Culturally Competent American Indian/Alaska Native Social Workers

Currently, the overwhelming majority of Native tribes face "continue to battle extraordinary health and social challenges" with poverty as a primary concern, followed by disease, mental health issues, drug and alcohol addictions, unemployment, violence, and victimization (Bubar, 2010). Cancer, once rare in this population, is now on the rise, and diabetes is at almost epidemic proportions (Roubideaux, 2005). Statistics show that Native women have the highest incidence of sexual assault, with 7.2 per 1,000 reported in 2000 compared to African American women at 4 per 1,000 and Caucasian women at 3 per 1,000 (Bubar, 2010). Further research shows that liver diseases, often linked to substance abuse, were the sixth leading cause of death for Native Peoples in the United States in 2001. Unintentional injuries were the third leading cause of death, and estimates by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism show that 75% of all unintentional injuries among American Indian/Alaska Natives are alcohol-related (Blume & Escobedo, 2005). Alcohol-related deaths are over seven times higher among American Indian/Alaska Natives than the overall United States population (Roubideaux, 2005). Those with alcohol abuse disorders are more likely to also suffer from a psychiatric disorder (Brave Heart, 2005). In addition, studies reveal that American Indian/Alaska Natives have high rates of mental distress at 13% compared with 9% in the general United States population. While little research is available on psychiatric disorders among American Indian/Alaska Natives, anecdotal evidence suggests "alarming rates" of

psychological problems including mood disorders, pathological reactions to violence and trauma, and suicide (Gone & Alcantara, 2005). In fact, suicide was the eighth leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Native Peoples as far back as 2001.

Unfortunately, many states and even local communities ignore the plight of American Indians/Alaska Natives. Often, non-Indian leaders view services for American Indian/Alaska Natives as the domain of the Native Peoples themselves or of their employers or the federal government. Frequently, American Indians/Alaska Natives in need of help become “invisible” in systems where delays are common and shuffling among clinicians is inevitable (Westermeyer & Graham, 2005). The Indian Health Service (IHS), financed by the federal government to provide primary care and public health services, is woefully underfunded and understaffed. IHS facilities are often inaccessible and may not offer the most current preventative care (Chino & DeBruyn, 2006; Roubideaux, 2005; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). Not surprisingly, American Indian/Alaska Native communities often have a distrust of the dominant society, given a 500-year history of oppression and domination. Programs seen as imposed from the outside often escalate this distrust and create further barriers.

Social workers, while usually well-intentioned, have often added to the distrust and lack of credibility. Historically, they have provided services that stressed assimilation into the dominant culture rather than social justice. In some instances, social workers have helped remove Native children from their homes and communities and pre-judged and labeled clients who do not conform to Western notions of health and treatment (Weaver, 2000). A case in point is one of a divorced full-blooded American Indian male who was in alcohol recovery for 10 years. Traditional spiritual practices helped him stay sober. However, he began to have suicidal impulses, which seemed to stem from a prematurely-held grief resolution ceremony for his deceased mother. The dominant culture’s treatment was to put him on antidepressants, which offered no relief. Finally, a traditional healing ceremony was held, resulting in a resolution to his grief and depression. Even though an evidence-based practice (antidepressants) was used, it was ineffective with this

traditionally-oriented client, suggesting the need for Native-designed interventions (Brave Heart, 2005).

Currently, there are approximately 566 federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native entities in the United States (U.S. Federal Register, 2015). In order to best serve American Indian/Alaska Native communities, it is critical to understand the culture, social structure, and politics of those being served. One important principle for American Indian/Alaska Natives is sovereignty, that is, the United States government’s recognition of Native Americans’ rights of self-governance and self-determination (Weaver, 2000). Effective support to American Indians/Alaska Natives must emerge from a comprehension of such principles plus a genuine understanding of the particular Indigenous community being served, not from people outside the culture determining what needs to be done. Striving for cultural competency – that is, working in a way that is appropriate to the behaviors and expectations of a cultural group – should be the foremost concern of social workers and activists who seek to help (Hawkins & Walker, 2005).

“Culturally-based, culturally-congruent, and culturally-grounded practices” that come out of the Native American community need to be supported and valued (Brave Heart, 2005). Native American traditions of healing and wisdom must not be ignored. Rather, social workers must find ways to demonstrate their commitment to the community, and must, in any programs or interventions, integrate cultural content and involve the community (Chino & DeBruyn, 2005; Hawkins & Walker, 2005; Moran & Davis, 2005). This is where Indigenous social workers have vital roles. Who better to understand and respect sovereignty? Who better to implement interventions with cultural appropriateness? Who better to dispel cultural barriers and suspicion?

If helping poor and disadvantaged populations is one of the main tenets of social work, the unique history and status of American Indians/Alaska Natives make this a group that should be among the main priorities of the profession (Limb, 2001). According to a study done by Gordon Limb, almost 40% of Native American students surveyed in an MSW program grew up in low socioeconomic circumstances; these same students expressed stronger interest in serving “economically disadvantaged people” than any other MSW students (Limb, 2001).

Fortunately, as Chino and DeBruyn (2006) indicate, there is now a major movement in the direction of tribal self-determination to address complex American Indian/Alaska Native health concerns. Many tribal public health professionals are using strategies for community capacity building and community empowerment as they begin to take control of their own health services. However, because of the disparities between Western “ways of knowing” and Indigenous approaches to knowledge, tribal capacity building must take into account both the traditional culture and the dominant Western culture in which it operates.

Thus, recruiting and retaining American Indian/Alaska Native MSW students who wish to practice social work in Indian Country is crucial. By offering their views and experiences on culturally appropriate services to Indigenous communities, American Indian/Alaska Native social workers become invaluable resources on practices, policies, and laws that affect this community. As they move toward more autonomy with regard to their own welfare, American Indian communities hope and expect these students to return to help facilitate change from within. Returning to their Native lands, American Indian/Alaska Native MSW scholars can then build and sustain collaborative approaches with tribal peoples, keeping social justice in the forefront of Native issues (Bubar, 2010).

The Founding of the Buder Center

The Buder Center was established more than 25 years ago to address the lack of trained American Indian/Alaska Native social workers who could serve in Indian Country. In 1990, Kathryn M. Buder, a lifetime resident of St. Louis who had respected and admired Native Americans from early childhood, contacted a number of universities in the St. Louis area seeking ideas for educational endeavors that would impact Native communities. A generous gift from Mrs. Buder endowed an academic center housed at the Brown School that would empower American Indian/Alaska Native communities by preparing tribal members for professional leadership through education. Leaders in the national American Indian/Alaska Native community, including Terry Cross (Seneca) of the National Indian Child Welfare Association and Gary Kimble (Gros Venture Arapaho) of the American

Association of Indian Affairs, assisted Mrs. Buder to define her vision for the Center. The Agreement of Understanding for the initial endowment of the Buder Center stated: “The American Indian Studies Program is designed to educate American Indian students and to have them work with the American Indian population for education, family preservation and well-being, and serving the American Indian people broadly” (1990).

In 1990, Dana Klar (Houma) was hired as the first director of the Buder Center. Ms. Klar focused early efforts on social and cultural aspects of the program. She recruited talented American Indians and developed a real sense of community among the students who left their homes for St. Louis, a city with a relatively small urban Indian population. In particular, Ms. Klar developed a “host families” program whereby Buder Scholars were hosted by local St. Louis families who assisted students in their transition to graduate school and the St. Louis area. Klar was instrumental in formulating a national advisory board, creating a comprehensive recruitment plan, ensuring American Indian/Alaska Native courses were offered, and building strong relationships with American Indian/Alaska Native community members in St. Louis. Klar remembers the influential mentorship of Dr. Priscilla Day (Minnesota Chippewa), Professor of Social Work at the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD), who provided the benefit of her experience as the new center took shape. Dr. Day taught the newly created “Social Work with American Indians” course. Dr. Day also developed a student experiential exchange program wherein a half-dozen UMD social work students journeyed to St. Louis for several days and met with our urban Native community representatives, sat in on classes, and experienced outings in the city; later that year, a number of Buder Center students spent several days experiencing UMD, local reservations, and tribal colleges. In addition, Klar has stated that Dr. Day provided invaluable guidance and mentorship when the Center was in its very early days. According to Klar, Dr. Day was “amazingly genuine; supportive, yet demanding; nurturing; encouraging; and capable of outstanding coaching. Unbeknownst to her, she provided for me the strength and courage I often needed to attempt to lead a program that at times felt overwhelmingly isolated from Native community.”

Building connections to the American Indian/Alaska Native community was a challenge for the nascent

center. The Buder Center benefitted significantly in the early years from the support and involvement of the local Native American community, particularly those connected to the now non-operational American Indian Center of Mid-America (AICMA). Native elders affiliated with AICMA were instrumental in facilitating community engagement with the Buder Center by co-hosting community gatherings and Pow Wows. Influential AICMA elders included Evelyn Voelker, Warren Comby, Martin Quintanilla, Charlotte Highley, Carter Revard, and Terry Smith-Packineau.

In addition, the establishment of a national advisory board enlisted American Indian/Alaska Native leaders from across the country to provide much-needed guidance for the center's structure and programming. Early members of the advisory board included Gary Kimble, Bishop Donald Pelotte, Donald McCabe, John Red Horse, Paul Stuart, Bruce Duthu, Sharon Nelson-Barber, and Robert E. Mele. Other key advisors were Mary Ann O'Neal, Phyllis Big Pond, and Spero Manson. Even Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee) and Cecilia Fire Thunder (Oglala Sioux), as chiefs of their respective nations, provided useful advice and connections at national gatherings and helped recruit some of the first Buder scholars.

At the Brown School, a brand new American Indian/Alaska Native curriculum required knowledgeable faculty to help ensure its success. Many elders contributed significantly to the teaching duties in those early days, including Suzanne Cross, Dan Edwards, John Red Horse, Charlotte Goodluck, Karen Swisher, Priscilla Day, Eddie Brown, and Carter Revard. Although they are not yet elders, it would be remiss not to also mention the teaching contributions of Hilary Weaver and Maria Brave Heart. The Buder Center is also in debt to early Native educators who encouraged the Council on Social Work Education to consider offering programming to the small but necessary group of Native American educators in social work. Elders in this category include Joyce White, Michael Jacobsen, and Edwin Gonzalez-Santin. Again, it would be remiss not to mention the contributions in this vein of other individuals who are not yet elders, including Steve Gunn, Miriam Jorgenson, Dana Klar, Hilary Weaver, Maria Brave Heart, Karina Walters, Sarah Kastelic, Gordon Limb, and Virginia

Whitekiller.

Dr. Eddie Brown (Pascua Yaqui) became the next director of the Buder Center in 1996 and held this position until 2004. Dr. Brown contributed to the growth of the center by developing a research agenda, procuring almost \$4 million in grant monies, and piloting a national graduate recruitment program for American Indian/Alaska Native students. His observation that "Indian Country needs more American Indian/Alaska Native social workers to practice in tribal and urban settings" informed not only his recruiting efforts but also his inspired mentorship of students, a legacy mentioned fondly by many Buder Center alumni.

Kerry Bird (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate/Lumbee), 1998 MSW alumnus, fondly remembers Dr. Brown as "a breath of air." He wrote:

He came to the Brown School with a fresh perspective of what the university could offer its American Indian students...building on what they had experienced, what they had to offer to each other and their classmates, and what they could learn at the school to take back to their American Indian communities to make the world a better place. Dr. Brown offered to share his own experiences, while challenging us to look beyond the initial thoughts we had for ourselves when we first came to the Brown School and to think much larger on what we could offer the world. Dr. Brown first came to the Brown School as the director of the Buder Center for American Indian Studies and left as an inspiration, a friend, a father, and most of all, a mentor.

The Buder Center in Focus

Since its founding, the Buder Center has remained committed to its central mission: to recruit and train American Indian/Alaska Native students with leadership potential who intend to practice social work in American Indian/Alaska Native communities and to develop curriculum that allows Buder scholars to specialize in social work practice relevant to American Indian/Alaska Native communities. In addition, the Buder Center has expanded its vision over the years to include developing a body of research that relates to social work practice in American Indian/Alaska Native communities; using pertinent research findings to

contribute to federal, state, and tribal social welfare policy development; and fostering institutional relationships between various national centers of American Indian/Alaska Native research.

The Kathryn M. Buder Scholarship fund has grown to provide funding for approximately 10 American Indian/Alaska Native MSW students to be admitted to the Brown School each year.

The MSW Buder Scholarship provides tuition, living expenses, professional development stipends, and assistance toward the purchase of books for two years of study for MSW students. There is also a commitment to fund qualified American Indian Ph.D. students. Funding for the Buder Ph.D. Fellowship Program is provided by a generous contribution by the Center for Social Development and the Brown School. In addition, the Buder Center provides academic support and mentoring to American Indian/Alaska Native students who receive funding from other sources. During the 2015-2016 academic year, there were 27 American Indian/Alaska Native scholars enrolled at the Brown School, representing 15 different Native tribes and nations. Additionally, the Brown School had 5 American Indian/Alaska Native Ph.D. students in 2015. Since the Buder Center's founding in 1990, the Brown School has graduated 147 American Indian/Alaska Native MSW students, 105 of which were funded by the Buder Scholarship. Of these alumni, 9 have earned a Ph.D. or Ed.D., 1 has an MBA, and 5 have earned a JD. In addition, an award from the Hearst Foundation granted in 2011 has allowed the Buder Center to support six Native and non-Native masters-level students who have an interest in working with American Indian/Alaska Native populations.

To increase academic knowledge related to American Indian/Alaska Native populations, the Buder Center has collaborated on additional course offerings, including "American Indian Social Welfare Policies and Administrative Practices," "Community Development with American Indian & other Indigenous Communities," "American Indian Societies, Cultures, & Values," along with "Social Work and American Indians." The newly established "Leadership Development and Evaluation in Indian Country" supports Buder students in reflecting on the skills they learn through planning the annual Washington University in St. Louis Pow Wow. In

addition, all students who complete the Buder curriculum graduate with a (newly approved) concentration in American Indian Studies.

Field education is a critical component of the Buder Center curriculum. Buder scholars must complete one of their practica in Indian Country serving a primarily Native population. A federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration has enabled the Center to establish the Social Workers Advancing through Grounded Education (SAGE) project, which supports MSW students in completing practica focused on mental and behavioral health services for Native children and youth. Through SAGE, the Buder Center has continued to expand partnerships with Indian Country while building capacity for culturally-informed mental and behavioral health treatment for Native children and youth.

The Center has also engaged American Indian/Alaska Native communities in research projects addressing the effects of FDA's graphic warning labels on cigarettes on smoking among Native Peoples, the role of Indigenous approaches to healing and treating post-traumatic stress disorders in Native populations, tribal asset building strategies, the impact of welfare reform, implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act, and diabetes prevention. WUSTL Medical School's Program for the Elimination of Cancer Disparities and the Buder Center continue to collaborate on preventative care for the American Indian community in St. Louis. The findings from these community-based research projects have contributed to public policy debates and the development of legislation such as S. 751 and companion bill HR 2770, the "American Indian Welfare Act," as well as HR 2750, the "Indian Child Welfare Act Amendments of 2003." Buder Center staff members have testified at congressional hearings and have made briefings at intertribal organizations, national advocacy groups, Congress, the federal administration, and research organizations.

Students at the Buder Center regularly participate in conferences, interdisciplinary activities, and community events that enhance knowledge. Buder scholars participate in panel discussions, projects, and presentations offering Native perspectives on a wide range of topics including food, social justice, art, research, child welfare, and human trafficking.

Several on-campus events provided opportunities for the American Indian Student Association to share their knowledge and experience and to broaden the perspectives of non-Natives. One such activity was a candlelight vigil honoring Indigenous Peoples Day. In conjunction with WUSTL's Edison Theater, the Buder Center hosted Rulan Tangen dance group and AnDa Union, Mongolian performers from China. In addition, Native American chef Nephi Craig showcased traditional Native foods to 150 guests on the WUSTL campus as part of the Hunt Fish Gather project. The Two Spirits interdisciplinary LGBT workshop, designed and implemented by Buder scholars, viewed diversity through a Native American lens.

As the Buder Center strives to achieve a healthy balance through our initiatives, we must recognize all who support the work of the Buder Center and the American Indian/Alaska Native students it serves. We are grateful to those who encourage and challenge Buder students academically; we also thank those who open doors, create opportunities, and lend the financial support that allows our scholars to move from the classroom to the "real world" and into leadership positions. The following quotes from Buder alumni capture the impact the Buder Center has had on them:

"The director Dana Klar, had host families lined up for us and they mentored us. They made us feel welcomed and showed us around St. Louis, University City, and the campus. This really made a difference in the retention of students in our program. We bonded from this experience because we were all so far away from family and home. I stayed with Dr. Carter Revard. He was my sponsor and I stayed with him during my time at the Brown School. He is a wonderful person and I still reach out to him for advice on my poetry." – James McIntosh (Cherokee), 1993 MSW alumnus

"The impact the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies has had on both my masters and doctoral education cannot be overstated. It is a welcoming place where my Alaska Native identity was honored and supported." – Jessica Black (Gwich'in Athabaskan), 2004 MSW alumna

"As a Buder scholar, I was able to foster lifelong relationships with other Buder scholars, and we

continue to remain close. We also work closely together on projects and trainings to provide supportive services in Indigenous communities." – Noel Frazier (Shinnecock), 2006 MSW alumnus

The Brown School continues to support the development and dissemination of social work knowledge. The Buder Center is unique and fortunate to be a part of an institution of higher learning where there is a deep commitment to both scholarship and application. It will continue to play an integral part in the restoration and reclamation of American Indian/Alaska Native communities and tribal governments through education, research, and development.

Conclusion

Historically, elders and tribal members have recognized those who demonstrated leadership potential, then cultivated their development. Often, these individuals possessed traditional characteristics such as humility, generosity, and respect for elders. The elders who helped to create the Buder Center continue to mentor Buder students and alumni, passing their wisdom, experiences, and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. New leaders carry on the values of their revered elders, continue to utilize systems for identifying and nurturing future leadership in ways that promote traditional values, and thus, traditional knowledge remains intact for the next generation of leaders.

LaDonna Harris is a member of the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma and President of Americans for Indian Opportunity. She is an activist in the areas of civil rights, environmental protection, and women movements. Harris explains: "As older people, we need to encourage young people to return. It's hard today for our youth to find their way back. Their educational experience doesn't prepare them for that. That's our responsibility as elders to articulate in order to show young people how they can not only come back, but feel comfortable coming back" (Adams, 2002, p. 19).

Harris also explains the four concepts common to traditional cultural values in American Indian communities: Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Redistribution. "Relationship is the kinship obligation: the profound sense that we human

beings are related not only to each other, but to all things. Everyone/everything in this extended family is valued and has a valued contribution to make. Therefore, our societal task is to make sure that everyone feels included and feels that they can make their contribution to our common good. This is one reason why Native Americans value making decisions by consensus because it allows everyone to make a contribution.

Responsibility is the community obligation. This obligation rests on the understanding that we have a responsibility to care for all of our relatives. Our relatives include everything in our ecological niche – animals and plants, as well as humans – even the rocks and earth. Responsible Indigenous leadership is based on an ethos of care, not of coercion. The most important responsibility of a leader is to create the social space in which productive relationships can be established and take place.

Reciprocity is the cyclical obligation. It underscores the fact that in Nature things are circular. For example, the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of life, as well as the dynamics between any two entities in relationship with each other.

Redistribution is the sharing obligation. Its primary purpose is to balance and re-balance relationships. In principle, one should not own anything one is not willing to give away. The basic principle is to keep everything moving, to keep everything in circulation” (Harris & Wasilewski, 2004, pp. 492-493).

As you can see, each of these values are related to all the others and build on each other. From our elders, we find strength, wisdom, and courage and owe them respect and gratitude. Carol Derrick Colmenero (Navajo), a 2006 Buder alumna pauses to reflect on her experience in life: “I will never lose touch with the friends that I met during my time at the Brown School. We will all become elders together. My advice to current AI/AN graduate students is to remember where you came from and what impact you will have in your community when you return home.”

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