

**Improving student learning and student retention at the undergraduate level
Application Cover Sheet**

Maximum funding for any single grant: \$50,000.

Proposal must be limited to two pages plus a budget page, in addition to the cover sheet.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Complete cover sheet
2. Attach 2 page proposal summary
3. Attach 1 page budget
4. Submit your proposal electronically to your college office for approval. College offices will submit recommended college proposals to the Provost office **no later than June 23, 2006 for FY'07 funding.**

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Department and College Affiliation Social Work

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Collaborators (other departments, if any):

Title of Your Proposal A Horizontal and Vertical Linkage Approach to the
Retention and Graduation of Social Work Majors

Theme of Your Proposal (Support for students; Fostering connections; Enhancing advisement; Other innovations): Improving linkages between classroom and professional goals

College rating (approved; not approved)

Approved

A Horizontal and Vertical Linkage Approach to the Retention and
Graduation of Social Work Majors

Georgia State University
School of Social Work
James L. Wolk
Professor and Director

June 2006

A Horizontal and Vertical Linkage Approach to the Retention and Graduation of Social Work Majors

Purpose

The School of Social Work requires undergraduate majors to take SW 2000, Introduction to Social Work. As part of the course, students are required to complete 20 hours of volunteer work at a human service agency or organization and write a paper about their experiences. In addition, the class uses guest speakers who are practicing social work in the community to provide students a broad picture of the type and kind of employment opportunities that exist for professional social workers.

The BSW program is a sequenced curriculum that begins in the Fall semester of the junior year (60+ hours). The SW 2000 course is proscribed in the Fall semester concurrently with 9 additional hours of social work required courses. In the Spring semester, students take 9 more hours of additional proscribed, sequenced courses. During the Senior year, students must take the first course in a two semester social work practice sequence (SW 3720) and a 200 hour supervised internship (SW 4930) that includes an integrative seminar. In the Spring semester, they must take the second course in the social work practice sequence (SW 3730) and 200 additional hours in the same supervised internship (SW 4940) and the integrative seminar.

The School offers two sections of SW 2000, of approximately 40 students each, in the Fall Semester. The overwhelming majority of students in those two sections have already been admitted into the Social Work Program. The admission deadline to the program is May 15 of the preceding semester. The retention and graduation rate for students from these two sections is high.

In the Spring semester, the School offers one section of SW 2000, also for about 40 students. This section attracts a wide range of students, including declared Pre-Social Work majors, as well as undecided sophomores who are searching for a major and seniors who need a class to graduate or are considering going on for an MSW. This is the section that will be targeted for an increase in the retention and graduation rates of social work students.

The purpose of this initiative is to create a supportive community atmosphere among students at different levels of the BSW that leads to increased retention and graduation rates. This proposal combines aspects of the Sophomore Connections and Peer Mentoring initiatives as well as building on existing curriculum features.

Goal

The goal of this project will be to increase the number of sophomores who select social work as a degree through an enhanced community student connection, with other sophomores considering social work as a profession as well as with other students in the program and the profession. The project will provide sophomores with first hand experiences of a senior internship and seminar. It will also showcase for sophomores the exciting, challenging, and dynamic nature of social work practice. An additional benefit is that it will also provide graduating seniors with experience in the important mentoring role inherent in professional relationships.

Project Activities

The goals of this project will be accomplished through creating both horizontal linkages with students in their own curriculum cohort and vertical linkages to more

advanced students in the social work program and the real time professional responsibilities of social work practice. To enhance the horizontal linkages, the Spring section of SW 2000 will be limited to 30 students who have completed between 30-50 credit hours towards graduation. The goal is to use this spring section as a retention course; students who have already been admitted to the program, students who are taking it just for graduation will be excluded from this section. In addition to the expectations that are required in SW 2000, the course will include an enhanced writing component. While it will not officially be a writing intensive course, it will engage the students in a more interactive and iterative process, including peer review of their work. The instructor will provide both group and individual academic advisement in consultation with the Advisement Center.

To enhance the vertical linkages, students in the Spring SW 2000 section will be paired with a senior student who is currently enrolled in the field internship program. The sophomore students will be required to spend 4 hours with a student mentor at his or her field placement. SW 2000 students will attend at least one integrative seminar with the senior mentor. It is predicted that the horizontal linkages to other sophomore students through the sharing of their experiences and the vertical linkages through their experiences with senior mentors will increase retention and graduation rates.

An MSW student will be selected for the Fall and Spring semester as a Graduate Research Assistant. This student will provide the faculty member support in a literature review and data gathering for the evaluation in the Fall semester and assist in the coordination of the vertical linkages in the Spring Semester.

Sophomores in the class will receive a subscription to *The New Social Worker*, a journal devoted to capturing the qualities of an entry level practitioner. The senior mentors will receive a year's student membership in the National Association of Social Workers in recognition of their professional commitment to provide mentoring to newer practitioners.

At the end of the Spring Semester, there will be a closing function to celebrate the new linkages that have been accomplished that will include the sophomore students, matched peer seniors, relevant School faculty, and involved field supervisors.

Evaluation

The evaluation of this proposal will take two forms. First, the School can use the previous three Spring sections of SW 2000 as baseline data. From those sections, we can track the retention and graduation of those students and compare those rates to students taking the SW 2000 course in Spring 2007.

Second, in order to improve the viability of this proposal, the School must be able to market the course to a sufficiently large number of students who are undecided about their major. To that end, included in this proposal is the recommendation that the faculty member who will be teaching the course be permitted to make a brief presentation in a randomly selected number of Introduction to Psychology and Introduction to Sociology courses or hand out flyers in those courses. The School has ample anecdotal evidence to suggest that many of those students would have opted for a social work degree if they had known of it prior to their senior year.

Budget

Faculty Course Buyout (Based on median salary of \$62,509)	\$7,864
Benefits @ 27.15%	\$2,156
GRA @ \$2,000/Sem	\$4,000
Sophomore Support	
<i>The New Social Worker</i> @ \$15 x 30 students	\$ 450
*\$100 Book Scholarship/30 students	\$3,000
Senior Support	
NASW Student Membership @ \$45 x 30 students	\$1,350
*\$100 Book Scholarship/30 students	\$3,000
Closing Function (\$5/person x 100)	\$500
Total	<u>\$22,620</u>

*This is a desirable, but optional expense.