

**Final Report
Research Enhancement Grant 2004**

Project Title: Perceptions of Latino Social Workers Regarding Doctoral Education and Academia

Principal Investigator: Mary S. Tijerina

Departmental Affiliation: School of Social Work

Abstract: Latinos in the U.S. remain under-represented in academia; this population group accounts for disproportionately low percentages of those enrolled in social work doctoral programs and of social work doctorates awarded nationwide. Latino social workers' perceptions of doctoral education and academia were explored using focus groups in three Texas localities. Masters' level social workers self-identifying as Latino with at least two years practice experience were recruited using purposive sampling. Sessions were tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using content analysis and pattern coding.

The sample (n=21) was predominantly female with a mean of 13.8 years practice experience. Participants reported being drawn to social work by a desire to help people, and most discovered social work after beginning baccalaureate studies. They perceived doctoral education as abandoning direct practice, viewed the research and publication demands of doctoral work as unappealing, and questioned the relevance of research topics pursued by academics. A majority of participants had served as field instructors for social work students; they perceived teaching as enjoyable and rewarding, especially the opportunity to mentor students. Although there was a lack of information as to what academic positions entail, participants were primarily interested in teaching part-time, secondary to their professional practice. Implications for increasing the Latino presence

in social work education include early promotion of academia as a social work career choice, presenting social work education as a vehicle for mentoring students and effecting change, and strengthening the connection between research and practice to address issues relevant to social work practice with Latino communities.

Publications: A manuscript is currently in process; intended for submission to the *Journal on Social Work Education*.

Presentations: Two presentations of the findings have been delivered, one national presentation and one local. They are:

Tijerina, M.S., Rubio, R. and Gonzalez, J. (2005, February). Latino Social Workers' Perceptions of Doctoral Education and Academia. Presentation at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education, New York, NY.

Tijerina, M. S. and Mayorga, B. (2005, April). Toward Diversifying Social Work Education: Latino Practitioners' Perceptions of Doctoral Education and Academia. Presentation at College of Health Professions Research Forum, Texas State University-San Marcos.

Pending and current support: To date, efforts have focused on the qualitative analysis of data and development of the draft manuscript. It is anticipated that the next phase of study will involve a larger-scale survey with a representative sample. Sources of support for that effort are being explored.