



## A Proposed Master of Social Work Based in Indigenous Knowledges Program in Manitoba

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### Key Words

Indigenous • social work • education • social work practice • decolonization • anti-colonial

### Abstract

This article focuses on an innovative proposed Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges program developed by an Indigenous Caucus within the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba in Canada. This culturally based program intends to ground students with a solid foundation in traditional Indigenous teachings and perspectives, and contemporary Indigenous philosophies, knowledges, concepts, critiques, and ways of being that stem from these traditions. The proposed Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges was developed as a lived program that builds community and social supports, and reclaims and re-energizes a sense of self, responsibility, self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-government. The program's aim is to deconstruct oppressive and colonialist structures and reconstruct, in a contemporary sense, what has been previously destroyed. An overview of the visions, objectives, program design, foundational themes and description of courses is provided, along with reflections on what teachings its development has provided.



## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2009 three Faculty members within the Faculty of Social Work were charged with the task of looking at Master level social work education with regard to Indigenous peoples. This idea was presented to the larger Indigenous Caucus and the Indigenous Caucus decided that we would develop a full Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges (MSW-IK). With this goal in mind an MSW-IK Development Committee was created within the Faculty of Social Work. It was clear that we, the Indigenous Caucus, wanted to create a Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges (MSW-IK) program from the ground up rather than *tinker* with the existing MSW which is built upon Euro-Canadian ideologies that reinforce the marginalization of Indigenous knowledges and practices. Indigenous researchers certainly provided sufficient evidence to support our move in this direction. For example, Battiste and Henderson (2000) wrote that the existing curriculum has given Indigenous peoples new knowledge to help them participate in Canadian society, but it has yet to empower Indigenous identity by promoting and understanding Indigenous worldviews, languages, knowledges, and practices. This lack of promoting Indigenous ways is also reflected in the description of colonialism given by Dr. Taiake Alfred (2004), Mohawk scholar and Director of the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria. He described colonialism as, “a fundamental denial of our freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way” (p. 89).

Rationale supporting the creation of the MSW-IK consisted of the following reasons: a large local and regional population of Indigenous peoples who serve within the profession of social work, a large number of Indigenous peoples interested in the social work profession, a gap of services relevant to Indigenous Peoples, a lack of long-term culturally relevant education for social workers, an important need for Indigenous social workers to develop a curriculum that directly addresses the needs, gaps, perspectives and practices of Indigenous Peoples. Currently in the approval process with the University of Manitoba (U of M), the proposed MSW-IK program is working to enhance the current offering of programs to meet the needs of faculty, students and the social service accessing public by implementing culturally-based social work education from Indigenous perspectives. The following overview focuses on the vision, objectives, design, themes, steps, and courses associated with this innovative MSW-IK program at the U of M's Faculty of Social Work.

## THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES OF A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK BASED IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES PROGRAM

This MSW-IK program is envisioned within the context of Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing, traditional helping practices, and perspectives. This program has a solid foundation that incorporates traditional Indigenous teachings

and languages with contemporary Indigenous philosophies, knowledges, concepts, critiques, and ways of being which have stemmed from these traditions. The program is also inclusive of critical theories and practices as a key element.

This proposed MSW-IK program is built on the commitments to build community, build social support, live by example, be a lived program, and to reclaim and re-energize self. It also intends to develop social workers' sense of responsibility to Indigenous peoples' and to support Indigenous peoples' self-sufficiency, self-determination, and self-governance. Thus, the program's aim is to deconstruct oppressive and colonialist structures, and reclaim and reconstruct, in a contemporary sense, what has been previously destroyed.

The program has nine objectives:

- Graduate social workers who will work from Indigenous perspectives;
- Support students in their personal development as social workers working from Indigenous perspectives;
- Provide historical understandings based on Indigenist and critical theory perspectives of the events which have led to the present circumstances Indigenous peoples face;
- Guide students in developing their understanding of anti-oppressive practices, social justice, anti-colonialism, and Indigenism and how these concepts apply to social work practice and social policy analysis;
- Explore Indigenous forms of helping and support applicable to the unique circumstances of Indigenous clients and communities;
- Recover and support Indigenous values, practices, and structures in the learning, healing, and decolonization processes of individuals, families, communities, and nations;
- Empower Indigenous identity through concepts such as social location, Indigenous worldviews, languages, knowledges, and practices;
- Support Indigenous scholars and practitioners to fully explore Indigenous helping practices, knowledges, and research as applicable to social work; and
- Maintain a close connection with Indigenous communities and agencies in the provision of the program.

It is anticipated that upon completion graduates will be able to practice from an Indigenist, anti-colonial perspective with the ability to consistently self-reflect and develop as social work practitioners. To practice from an Indigenist perspective requires an understanding of Indigenism. An Indigenist practitioner incorporates traditional Indigenous values, beliefs, ethics, practices, ceremonies, and social structures and has the ability to:

- reflect traditional Indigenous cultural values, beliefs, ethics, practices, ceremonies, and social structures within social work helping contexts and social justice;
- establish and maintain relationships with others based upon traditional Indigenous cultural values, beliefs, protocols, and ways of interacting;
- develop programs and/or policies that stem from traditional Indigenous cultural perspectives and ways of being; and
- implement and uphold these perspectives as a means to countering various forms of oppression.

To practice from an anti-colonial perspective requires the ability to understand the fourth world colonial context of Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island (Manual & Posluns, 1974) and how this context has hindered and/or blocked Indigenous self-determination and development. This also includes the ability to:

- understand oppression, particularly fourth world colonialism;
- relate colonialism with parallel forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, homophobia, privileging, and ableism;
- confront and address matters of privilege, racism, marginalization, and institutionalization that create oppressive practice and policy; and
- advocate from a position of partnership with Indigenous peoples on matters pertinent to their self-determination and development.

Indigenist, anti-colonial practitioners will be able to consistently self-reflect in ways that require reflexivity, awareness of social location, understanding of the significance of identity and relational development; and, explain the role of Indigenous helping practices and ceremonies in personal, familial, and community development.

### **PROGRAM DETAILS**

Overseen by a Council of Elders, the program will encompass the following staff positions: Program Elders, Program Director, Faculty Instructors, a Student Advisor, and an Administrative Support Staff person. Students will also be connected to their own Advisor Council.

The Council of Elders' will be made up of three to six Elders who either reflect the Dakota, Ojibway, Cree, Métis, Oji-Cree and Dene nations, the four directions in Manitoba or the northern, southern and provincial capital regions of Manitoba. The volunteer based Council of Elders would provide advice on the overall implementation and operations of the program to ensure it remains connected to and reflective of the Indigenous cultures in central Canada and beyond. It will meet a minimum of two times a year to provide program policy and curriculum direction as well as to review program administrative matters and program courses prior to delivery.

The program will include two full-time Elders to reflect the value of balance within many Indigenous cultures. The program Elders will be lead instructors for the five Elder based courses. They will also be members of the students' Advisor Councils where they will review the students' developments and progress in the program.

Each student will be assigned an Advisor Council that consists of one of the program's Elders, a program instructor, and a third individual connected to the student's major project or thesis. Each Advisor Council will conduct a minimum of four reviews with the student. These reviews are meant to address the student's project/thesis progress and to help identify areas that require further attention before the council can give approval that the step has been successfully completed. This process reflects many Indigenous peoples' rites of passage and thus a ceremonial aspect would be incorporated upon the completion of each step.

The program will have a half-time director, and two full-time Faculty Instructors whose primary responsibilities will be the administration of the program and course delivery respectively. The program will have administrative support provided by a Student Advisor and an Administrative Support person.

#### PROGRAM DELIVERY AND LOCATION

The proposed MSW-IK will have fluidity by including several modes of delivery pertinent to the students, Elders, and instructors. The variety of delivery formats such as blended learning, web conferencing, as well as face-to-face interactions will allow for maximum flexibility for students and instructors.

We identified the need for a geographically separate program site away from the main U of M campus. An off-campus location is important for three reasons. First of all, this will highlight the fact that the program is not a specialization or a stream within a predominantly mainstream model. Instead, it is meant to be a holistic experience grounded in an alternate intellectual and cultural paradigm. Second, an off-site location will allow students and faculty to build a community of learning that fosters the acquisition and/or centering of Indigenous worldviews. This community environment can provide social supports students may need for their internal healing as they proceed through decolonization and cultural centering processes. Third, an off-campus location, perhaps in Winnipeg's inner city, will be close to Indigenous agencies and field placements and will also permit students to learn of and be grounded by community strengths and challenges.

## **THEMES OF A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK BASED IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES PROGRAM**

The MSW-IK is based upon three fundamental themes: Indigenous Knowledges, Social Work-Critical Knowledge, and Project/Thesis Development. As a part of our original visioning, these three themes provide the frameworks for development of social work practitioners deeply rooted in an Indigenist, anti-colonial perspective as the following sections describe.

1. Indigenous Knowledges. This program theme reflects the concept of *Indigenism*. The focus is on Elder guidance and teachings for each course. Emphasis is placed on the student to self-reflect and self-develop as a gendered individual, family member, community member, individual of cultures, and person with connection to lands and territory. Throughout the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges, cultural and ceremonial teachings, we are also critically aware that the intention of this program and these courses is to prepare graduates for Indigenist social work practice, not to be or practice as a traditional healer, teacher, helper, or Elder. As such, responsibility and respect of the protocol connected to learning about Indigenous knowledges will be reinforced throughout the program.

2. Social Work-Critical Knowledge. This program theme reflects the concepts of *anti-colonialism* and *social justice* by focusing on critical theories as they relate to Indigenous peoples. Although colonialism would have primary importance, post-colonialism, structural social work, radical social work, cultural studies, feminism, and anti-oppressive studies also will be included as supporting contributors to social work practice with Indigenous peoples. This includes critical reflection of societies surrounding Indigenous peoples, as well as self-reflection as a gendered individual, family member, community member, individual of cultures, and person with connection to lands and territories in relation to the oppression of Indigenous peoples.

3. Project/Thesis Development. This theme primarily addresses the *being-in-becoming* and *relational* aspects of the program. Students will be guided as they complete one of the following options: (a) a research project or thesis, (b) an advanced course-based field placement in an Indigenous agency or organization, (c) work as an *oskapewis/skabay* (Elder's helper), or (4) a major project approved by the Advisor Council such as a full-length educational video on a pertinent social issue or practice. Unlike current MSW programs where students complete their research or advanced course-based field placement after their course work, this project/thesis will be completed in a collaborative process in conjunction with the other program courses. This approach to innovative sequencing provides consistent and in-depth support for students as they complete the requirements of the MSW-IK program.

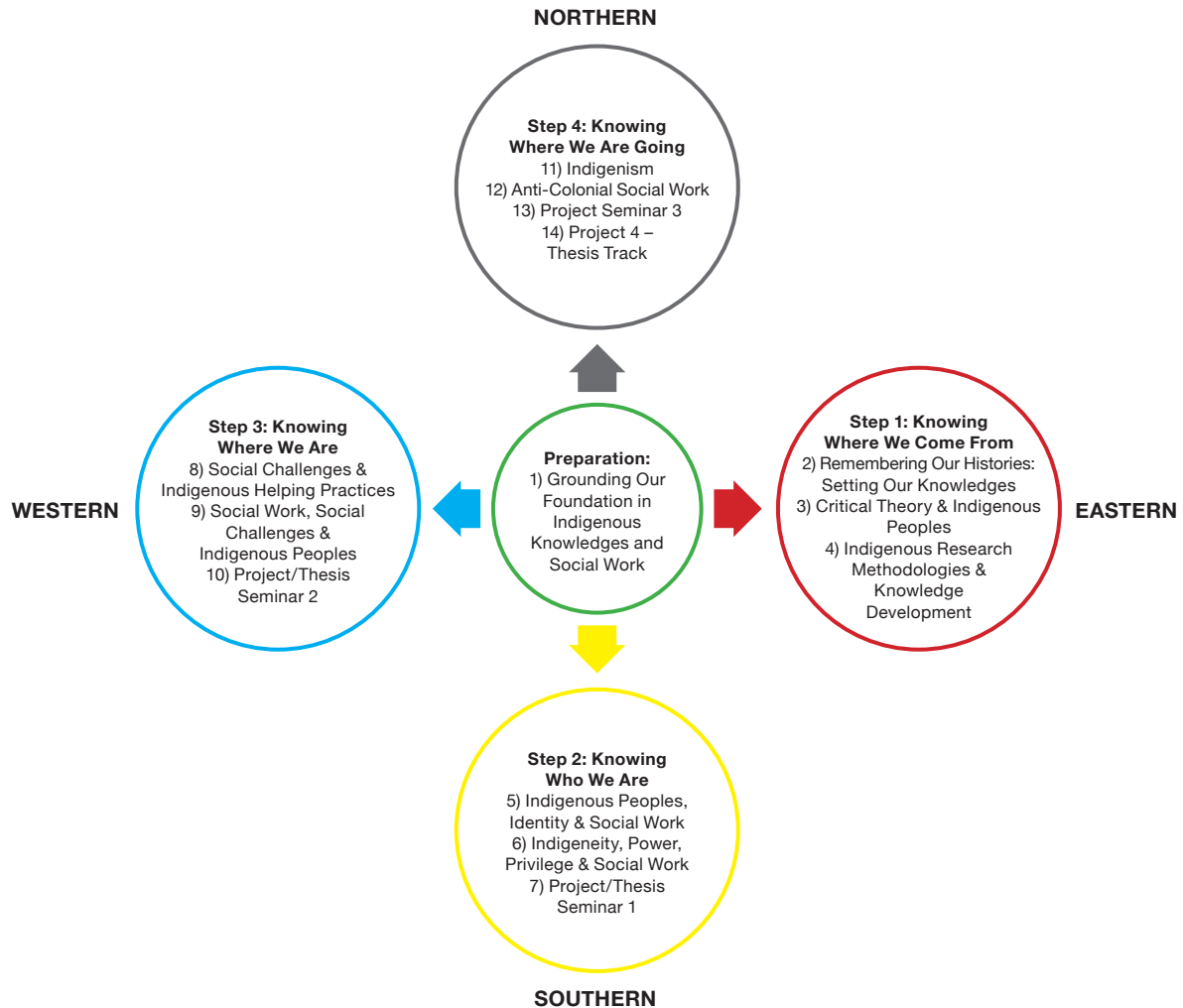
These three themes, Indigenous Knowledges, Social Work-Critical Knowledge and Project/Thesis Development, are reflected throughout each of the four program steps described in the next section.

#### THE STEPS OF A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK BASED IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES PROGRAM

The MSW-IK is built upon four steps that reflect the guidance of the late Art Solomon, an Anishinaabe Elder. Elder Solomon explained that in order to know where we are going, we need to know where we are. In order to know where we are, we need to know who we are. And, in order to know who we are, we need to know where we come from. Thus, the four program steps are: Step One – Knowing where we come from; Step Two – Knowing who we are; Step Three – Knowing where we are; and, Step Four – Knowing where we are going. The three themes, Indigenous Knowledges, Social Work-Critical Knowledge and Project/Thesis Development, are envisioned as a concentric circle as they are central to the whole program and the four steps identified above are represented in each of the cardinal directions as each step makes up a part of the whole.

Step one, Knowing Where We Come From, focuses on addressing history, establishing a common group understanding of Indigenous knowledges, and reviewing critical theories that have supported Indigenous peoples through historical, current and future potential oppressions. Step two, Knowing Who We Are, concentrates on the current identity of Indigenous peoples and how to look at ourselves as gendered individuals, family members, community members, and as a peoples. This step addresses how Indigeneity is currently maintained and challenged, how oppression has been internalized, as well as the roles of social work and social theories within these processes. Therefore, application of theories and teachings begins by looking at ourselves as gendered individuals, peoples, and societies. Step three, Knowing Where We Are, focuses on the social challenges Indigenous peoples face today and examines how Indigenous helping practices are implemented. It addresses processes of colonialism and decolonization. It emphasizes the idea of social location, means of developing/changing/revitalizing locations, and Indigenous and critical theories that support social work practice and policy analysis. Step four, Knowing Where We Are Going, builds on teachings and theories introduced in previous steps and explores how these teachings and theories can be implemented in program, community and policy development. The focus will reinforce self-determination through the practical application of Indigenous knowledges and practices in both Indigenous and social work contexts.

**FIGURE 1: PROGRAM STEPS AND COURSES**



**THE COURSES OF A MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK BASED IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES PROGRAM**

This MSW-IK reflects the various Indigenous perspectives that life is a journey. One way to take this journey is often referred to as the *Red Road*, which emphasizes Indigenous knowledges and practices, self-development, healing, and growth. Each of the four steps previously described has three courses. While these courses are interconnected and touch on each of the program’s three themes, Indigenous



Knowledges, Social Work-Critical Knowledge, and Project/Thesis Development, each course focuses specifically on one of the three themes. When the preparatory course Grounding Our Foundation in Indigenous Knowledges and Social Work is included there are a total of fourteen courses to the program. A student will take 13 out of the 14 courses offered. These courses are represented in Figure 1 (above) and are discussed in more depth in the following sections.

### PREPARATION: GROUNDING OUR FOUNDATION IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES IN SOCIAL WORK

This preparatory course, depicted in the centre circle of Figure 1, is the introduction to the program and consists of a cultural retreat with Elders from various Indigenous nations. Students will have the opportunity to interact with the Elders, program instructors, and one another as well as partake in Indigenous helping processes. Further, students will review foundational concepts and teachings that are key to Indigenous ways of helping. This course will be delivered prior to all others as a means of grounding the students with a common foundation and sense of community. This grounding will provide the students with the opportunity to confirm that this program is what they expected and wanted. Program instructors and Elders will assess the students based on their active participation in all activities and practices, their ability to work with peers, Elders, and instructors, and their successful completion of all assignments.

The first step in the full-time program consists of three courses: Remembering our Histories - Setting Our Knowledges, Critical Theory and Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Research Methodologies and Knowledge Development. This step is depicted in the Eastern circle in Figure 1. The course Remembering our Histories – Setting our Knowledges, addresses the Indigenous Knowledges theme and covers the topics of creation stories, community histories, family histories, personal histories, the role of languages, and traditional knowledge of helping processes. These topics are meant to raise the students' awareness and historical connection to their families, communities, peoples, and/or lands, as well as establish an understanding of *relationship* and its significance in traditional Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. Indigenous helping knowledge will be addressed through the guidance of the program Elders, guest Elders and speakers, readings on traditional practices, circles focussed on personal experiences, and participation in helping activities as a class.

The course Critical Theory and Indigenous Peoples, addresses the Social Work-Critical Knowledge theme and review of critical social theories with primary focus on colonialism and social justice in relation to social work will be completed. Anti-colonialism, anti-oppressive approaches, feminist approaches and other critical perspec-

tives in relation to Indigenous peoples will be examined from Indigenous perspectives. The relationship between theory and Indigenous peoples will be drawn out through class presentations by the instructor, guest speakers, as well as circle discussions.

The third course in the first step is Indigenous Research Methodologies and Knowledge Development. This course will provide a foundation for the students' development of their project or thesis. As discussed earlier, projects may take the form of a research project, an advanced field placement in an Indigenous agency or organization, work as a *oskapawis/skabay* (Elder's helper), or another project approved by their Advisor Council such as the development of a full-length video on a social work matter pertinent to Indigenous peoples. This course will examine research epistemologies and methodologies based in Indigenous ontologies and social experiences in the context of social work research with Indigenous peoples. Influences of colonization, Indigenism, and decolonization on knowledge development will be incorporated. In completion, students will have identified their Advisor Councils, completed their project or thesis proposals, and had their proposals reviewed by their Advisor Councils.

The second step in the program has the following three courses: Indigenous Peoples, Identity and Social Work; Indigeneity, Power, Privilege and Social Work; and Project/Thesis Seminar 1. This step is depicted in the Southern circle in Figure 1.

The course, Indigenous Peoples, Identity and Social Work, addresses the Indigenous Knowledges theme. The topics covered in the course include naming, clans, societies, cultural and national identities, creation stories and self-identities, and cultural influences on identity such as ceremonies, songs, and the land. These topics are meant to ground the students' understanding of how they currently see themselves and how their relationships at gendered individual, family, clan, community, and nation levels contribute to identity development. The topics also serve to develop a deeper understanding of the people they are working with and how they understand themselves. As such, these topics will help the student to understand the significance of personal, familial, communal, and cultural foundations. The topics will be addressed through discussions and presentations by Elders and invited speakers, participation in sharing/learning circles, interviews and reflections with family and community members, and maintaining a detailed reflective journal.

The second course, Indigeneity, Power, Privilege and Social Work, addresses the Social Work-Critical Knowledge theme and covers the topics of Indigeneity, internalized oppression, Aboriginalism and Indianism, whiteness, white privilege, racism, and identity developmental influences such as gender and ethnicity. Impacts of these areas in relation to social policies and social work practice with gendered individuals, families, communities and nations will be examined. While these topics are focused on colonialism and identity, thus somewhat invested in the two streams of colonizer/colonized development, they also include an analysis of the binaries

found in many social work theories. These topics will be addressed through class discussion, case scenario reviews, current policy reviews, guest speaker presentations, and topic-focused talking circles.

The third course in this step, Project/Thesis Seminar 1, focuses on initiating knowledge development in practice settings. Students will learn to apply Indigenous and critical social work epistemological and methodological concepts by finalizing their project/thesis proposal and beginning their project activities. Students will be working on their chosen projects with their primary advisors. They will keep a detailed journal of their experiences, which will be reviewed by their Advisor Council at the end of this seminar.

The third step in the program has the following three courses: Social Challenges and Indigenous Helping Practices, Social Work, Social Challenges and Indigenous Peoples, and Project/Thesis Seminar 2. This step is depicted in the Western circle in Figure 1.

The course, Social Challenges and Indigenous Helping Practices, focuses on the Indigenous Knowledges theme and addresses the current challenges Indigenous peoples are facing. It will be primarily based on how Indigenous Elders, traditional teachers and/or medicine people identify, interpret and meet these challenges. It will also look at how positive identities and how today's traditional leaders and Elders support relationships through various Indigenous helping practices. This course will incorporate presentations and discussions by Elders, traditional teachers and instructors, participation in Indigenous helping practices, talking circles, group reflections on participations, and detailed self-reflective journals.

The second course in this step is Social Work, Social Challenges and Indigenous Peoples. Focusing on the Social Work-Critical Knowledge theme, this course presents challenges Indigenous peoples are facing from critical theory lenses, in particular, decolonization and social justice. It reviews policies and practices that currently affect Indigenous peoples as well as how they support and limit Indigenous peoples' views, practices, cultures, and identities. This course looks closely at the concept of social location and how current social work policies and practices keep Indigenous peoples in particular locations. This course speaks to the implementation of policies and practices by Indigenous organizations as one means to develop alternative locations and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. It incorporates field visits to various Indigenous organizations and presentations by Indigenous social workers and leaders who rely upon Indigenous perspectives and helping practices in their respective organizations and activities.

The third course in the third step is the Project/Thesis Seminar 2. This seminar will continue to guide students on their application/research of Indigenous practice knowledges in their chosen projects/theses and to ensure students are

actively implementing their projects/theses as outlined in their approved proposals. Students will maintain a detailed journal of their experiences to be reviewed by the Advisor Council at the end of this seminar.

The courses in the program's fourth step are Indigenism, Anti-Colonial Social Work, Project Seminar 3, and Project 4 – Thesis Track. This step is depicted in the Northern circle in Figure 1.

The first course in the fourth step, Indigenism, focuses on the Indigenous Knowledges theme through group participation in Indigenous helping practices. The students will concentrate on how to implement these Indigenous helping practices in communities and organizations as a way to support gendered individuals facing social challenges. Based in present circumstances, this course considers how gendered individuals, families, organizations, and communities may be able to support the on-going presence of such practices as sweat lodge ceremonies, fast camps, and sun dances. Key elements of the course includes participation in Indigenous ceremonies and circle discussions to reflect on the group's participation, presentations by Elders, ceremonial hosts/leaders/facilitators, and traditional teachers, as well as the completion of in-depth reflective journals. It may also include a group project focused on the development and implementation of Indigenous helping practices as guided by an Elder connected to the program.

The second course, Anti-Colonial Social Work, focuses on the Social Work-Critical Knowledge theme and is a hands-on course. Students will work on (q) developing individual or group projects that reflect Indigenous knowledges, practices, and self-determination, or (b) taking action that supports, demonstrates and/or advocates for Indigenous self-determination through program development and/or policy changes, and implementation in organizations and programs in their surrounding territory. There will also be reflections on how the project and/or actions reflect and contribute to development of anti-colonialism, social justice, and/or Indigenism. In addition to significant project participation, critical group self-reflections, and detailed reflective journals, this course will incorporate presentations by community leaders whose actions reflect anti-colonialism, social justice and/or Indigenism.

For students working on a project, they will take Project Seminar 3 as their third course in the fourth step. In this course students will be completing their final project tasks. By this time they will have implemented their projects, and they will be completing the written and/or oral presentation component of their projects. They also will be completing final journal entries to be reviewed by the Advisor Council at the end of this stage.

For students completing a thesis, Project Seminar 4 will be their third course in the fourth step. In this final stage of the thesis track, students will be completing their thesis. By this time they will have implemented their research project, and they will be completing the written and/or oral presentation component of their thesis.

**FIGURE 2: THE PROGRAM STRUCTURE**



## PROGRAM SCHEDULE

The flexibility in time and pace is reflected in the program schedule (see program schedule presented in Figure 2 below). Course delivery will coincide with activities occurring in Indigenous communities. For example, students will partake in certain ceremonial activities that occur during the spring and summer months. Hence, the courses heavily based in connecting with communities and ceremonies are delivered at this time. In other words, while the program will have set periods of when courses will be addressed, it is flexible enough to provide students with options on how quickly they will proceed through the program. Although there is the option to complete the program on a full-time basis, the program is amenable to part-time students.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MSW-IK PROGRAM

Currently, the MSW-IK has been reviewed and supported by the University of Manitoba up to, and including, the Board of Governors and it is now submitted to the provincial government for review. Since its initial stages in 2009, the MSW-IK has been in development for over five years. Being a part of the MSW-IK development process has been an enlightening and beneficial journey for the Indigenous Caucus and; at times, it seems to be a journey that has been very slow moving. As such, we feel it would be valuable to take some time to pause and reflect on what we have learned from this journey so far. One common thought is that patience has been a necessary attribute needed by the program developers as the proposal development moved through the various stages that included community consultations, course development, editorial revisions, and the intense approval processes within the academy. At each step, the development committee members had to provide support to one another to ensure members continued to carry the proposal through the processes. Giving up would have been easy.

We have learned how different Indigenous perspectives are from mainstream perspectives. The development committee members had to invest significant amounts of time, attention, and energy to educate others about these differences. What is more, for people who are not based in Indigenous perspectives, it is their challenge to know how to support such a program. The mindset we have often encountered is that if they do not know what to do, they don't do anything at all. In the more challenging circumstances, individuals who do not know about Indigenous perspectives often tried to have the proposal changed so that it conformed to the mainstream perspectives within the academy. We learned to be prepared for these critiques against the MSW-IK that are based upon universal or mainstream perspectives. Also, we have experienced the extent to which it is necessary to compromise in order to fit into an institution that has not been established to accommodate Indigenous perspectives. With this in mind, it has been critical for us to have a clear understanding of those things that are not to be compromised.

The Indigenous Caucus has always maintained the value of ongoing community consultation and involvement; however, we continue to appreciate the participation and support of the Indigenous communities, locally, provincially, and nationally, as we continue to move through this journey. People within the community are eager for the MSW-IK to be implemented and often inquire about when they can enroll. It is motivating and encouraging to experience this excitement, especially when the institutional process lags or when we come across barriers. This excitement serves as a positive reminder that this program is sought out within the community.

Being a part of the MSW-IK development process has been a unique opportunity for Indigenous graduate students as well. Involvement in developing the program has allowed Indigenous graduate students to positively inform and shape the development of the program because it holds promise for what they have long wanted, expected, and hoped for in an MSW program. It also provided them with a hands-on example of community development within a key societal institution. This experience supported their learning about Indigenism, Indigenist social work, cultural safety, stereotypes, racism, and self-determination within a colonial state.

The process also has informed us about working with non-Indigenous allies. This program could not have been brought forward without our allies since the present academic structure do not have Indigenous peoples present at each level of the university hierarchy. Without Indigenous peoples at various levels throughout the academic structure, we have to rely on our non-Indigenous colleagues. This reliance on our non-Indigenous colleagues required us to educate our potential allies about the proposal, the need for the program, and the program's merits. We have also had to rely on them to carry the proposal forward in several circumstances. As such, we had to recognize where they were at, identify who was a potential ally, and place trust in their support. While this additional work was frustrating at times due to additional work that was required by the Indigenous members of the development committee, it was recognized as a necessity in order to advance the proposal.

Overall, the MSW-IK is a critical example of taking action to create space for Indigenous knowledges because it reaches beyond the need to address the lack of culturally relevant social work curriculum; it challenges the larger context – the university as a mainstream institution. It is through the collective collaboration and commitment of the Indigenous Caucus that the MSW-IK has been able to come to the final stage of development. Alone this would have been an insurmountable feat, but as a cohesive group the MSW-IK continues to steadily move forward in the Indigenization of social work and the academy and the creation of space for Indigenous knowledges.

## CONCLUSION

This Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges is envisioned within the context of Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing, practices, and perspectives. It is an opportunity for the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba to honour its mission to prepare social work students for social work practice in Indigenous communities in culturally based and appropriate ways, and to acknowledge, support, and promote Indigenous peoples' traditionally based knowledge and methods of knowledge gathering. The Indigenous Caucus and the MSW-IK Development Committee have developed this innovative program with the intention of creating a strong culturally based and relevant social work foundation to address gaps in current social work practice and education systems. Respect for Indigenous perspectives is evidenced when education "incorporates processes and methodologies which directly address the effects of genocide, colonization and oppression" (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 6). According to Freire (1993), what is required is praxis which involves both consciousness and action where the perception of Indigenous peoples' reality is not seen as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform; and that this perception must become the motivating force for liberate action, enlisting them in the struggle to free themselves. This consciousness and action should be sought at all levels: individual, family, community and nation.

From an Indigenous perspective, the people need to recapture their languages, histories, and understanding of the world and live those teachings that will support them in overcoming oppression and reaching *mino-pimatsiwin*, the good life. This includes the point that social institutions such as education, including university education programs, must be developed and based upon the languages, values and beliefs of the Indigenous peoples (Hart, 2002). We have risen to address this point and have clearly articulated within the development of the Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledges (MSW-IK) program that we are committed to ensuring an education that is relevant and transformative for Indigenous peoples. As such, we believe this proposed program is an excellent model for Social Work education.

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Being-in-becoming is explained by Sue and Sue (2003) as a value orientation where our purpose in life is to develop our inner self.

Relational here refers to the episteme—way of being in the world—where relationships are highly significant and the primary focus for interactions and being in the world (Hart, 2007).

Teachings refer to understandings of particular matters forwarded from one individual to another. It is understood that such teachings have been gained through means of traditional learning, thus are reflections of traditional knowledge. See Brant-Castellano (2000) for further information on traditional knowledge.