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## THE SOCIAL WORK STANDARD

*Professor Lori Robison takes her social work students out of the classroom making them ‘real world’ ready*

*by Kathy Punches '96, Director of Public Relations and Marketing*

**S**ocial work professor Lori Robison has focused much of her career on clinical social work, that is, individual and family treatment. One of the most satisfying aspects of her work at Defiance College is teaching students the fine points of client interviews, assessment, and planning intervention.

“What I enjoy is watching students practice their skills, applying new knowledge to case situations in the field. Theoretical courses are important, but since social work utilizes hands-on training, students appreciate the practical side that they can put to immediate use,” says Robison, who joined DC in 2001 as director of the social work program.

Defiance’s social work program is held in high regard in the professional community.

The pass rate of its students who take the American Association of Social Work Boards exam to gain licensure in Ohio is more than 95 percent.

“Students who come into the program are passionate about the field, are committed to what they are doing, and take to it pretty well,” notes Robison. What distinguishes Defiance’s curriculum from others is multiple field experiences, applying book knowledge and curriculum content directly to real-world



settings. Juniors take part in 140 hours of field experience, while seniors perform 450 hours in placement. “We exceed the standard which I think has been a benefit to the students,” says Robison. The variety in agencies and experiences gives students the opportunity to work with different populations, giving them a better idea of what the job demands.

Some students perform internships in social service agencies, working with victims of abuse as well as their offenders. “Some do well with the victims but not necessarily the offenders, or vice versa,” says Robison. “Hearing the stories of victims and children who’ve been traumatized emotionally, it’s something they find stressful.” Other students enjoy working with the elderly and are not afraid to work with someone in the end of life stage. “They may cherish being with someone in their last moments of life. So it’s important for any professional to know where their limits are.”

The social work program partners with the Family Justice Center of Northwest Ohio as a field site for students in the FJC partner agencies. One partner is the House of Ruth domestic violence shelter which allows students to work with intake, go to court, and work alongside attorneys and victim advocates.

Defiance College also partners with FJC to offer a site for ongoing training and education for professionals on a variety of topics such as protection orders, stalking, and cybercrime.

Northwest Ohio Community Action Commission’s PATH Center for the homeless provides another valuable opportunity for social work students. The agency and DC partner on numerous educational and direct service activities such as Empty Bowls, Night Without a Home, Hunger Banquet, and the Salvation Army Christmas Project which provides gifts and food vouchers.

To give social work students yet another dose of the real world, Robison plans the College’s annual urban trip done in conjunction with the Introduction to Social Work course. Students and faculty travel to an urban center – Chicago, Detroit, Columbus, or Cleveland – where they visit social service agencies to contrast urban and rural settings. The trip, which is open to all social work majors and students in the Intro course, gives an eye-opening look at the differences in rural and urban poverty and the challenges faced by social work professionals.

Robison notes that Defiance’s social work students will soon have the opportunity to participate in the College’s Hench Autism Studies Program. Courses will be added to the social work curriculum that will allow students to receive many of the required educational components for certification by the Ohio Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities in Adult Services or Service and Support Administration. Students will have specialized knowledge and skill for working with the growing population of persons with autism and their families as well as persons with other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Robison participated in an international project during the 2007-08 academic year, traveling as a McMaster Associate Fellow to Cambodia where she worked alongside students and other faculty members at the Cambodia Women’s Crisis Center. “Early in my career I worked in a domestic violence shelter in a Chicago suburb, so I felt I had some knowledge I could put to use as well as gain knowledge about how victim services in Cambodia are the same or different from services in the U.S.”

She also looked at service delivery and best practices between CWCC and the Family Justice Center of Defiance to determine areas of interface between the two organizations, including intake and assessment, intervention planning, resource development, treatment models and discharge planning.

She will return to Cambodia in May as a McMaster Fellow, this time responding to a need for staff training in conflict resolution. She will be incorporating information on personality and temperament type in styles of communication and decision-making. She will also assist students with their projects which include training in reproductive health, sex trafficking, STD’s, and photo documentation of evidence.



## HOMELESSNESS FACTS

Rural homelessness, like urban, is the result of poverty and lack of decent affordable housing.

Rural homeless are less likely to live on the street and more likely to live in a car or camper or with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing.

Homeless people in rural areas are more likely to be white, female, married, currently working, first-time homeless, and for a shorter period of time.

*--National Coalition for the Homeless*

And Robison enjoys the hands-on application of her professional skills, putting it to use beyond the classroom. She does part-time counseling at her church and serves on the family selection committee for Defiance County Habitat for Humanity, reviewing applications for Habitat’s home ownership program.

Robison finds it a daunting task to prepare students for the demands of a profession that can be extremely challenging, is constantly changing, and is often undervalued. “But it is also one of the most rewarding things that I have ever done,” she reflects. “Educating students for a lifelong vocation is both an honor and a privilege, and I feel blessed to have been given the opportunity to do so.

“The students who graduate from our program inspire me more so than the other way around. They are truly making a difference in the lives of others each and every day. Yes, they definitely defy the ordinary! I just hope I can continue to keep up with them!” ♦