

## **Historical Background**

Social Work education began at California State University, Chico in 1956. Due to a growing need for trained social workers throughout northern California, the Northeastern County Welfare Directors enlisted the support of the California State Legislature and lobbied CSU, Chico to establish a program to deliver undergraduate and graduate degrees in social welfare. The first coordinator, the sole full-time social welfare faculty member, was hired in 1958. In fall 1959, the undergraduate program in social welfare was established.

The service area of the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work Program at CSU, Chico covers 12 northeastern California counties. This region is unique in that there are no large cities (CSU, Chico, Center of Economic Development, 1999). The 12 counties consist predominantly of small cities and towns with large areas of rural countryside. The two most populous cities in the region are Chico, with 86,187 residents, and Redding, with 89,861 residents (California Department of Finance, 2014). The “North State,” a colloquial term for the northern California region, covers an area approximately the size of Ohio (44,828 square miles) and has many rural areas where there are distinct rural poverty and child welfare needs (McNall, 2004).

The 12 counties served by CSU, Chico share a number of similar economic challenges. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, California’s poverty rate is 16%. 10 of the 12 counties in the CSU, Chico service area have poverty rates that exceed the state average. However, the statewide unemployment rate in California dropped under 7% in early 2015. All of the 12 counties in our service area had unemployment rates well above the state average, ranging from 7.5% in Butte County to 21.6% in Yuba County.

## **Campus Efforts to Increase Capacity**

A severe statewide shortage of graduates in all areas of social work practice has been documented for more than 15 years. There is an even greater shortage of social workers in Northern California where there are higher levels of poverty. This shortage is of major concern and has resulted in legislative hearings in an effort to find solutions to the problem. This consequential issue has attracted national attention in the form of several articles in the National Association of Social Workers News (NASW News, March 2002, February 2002, October 2001, April 2001, January 2001, October 2000, September 2000). In the 2004 California Master Plan Report, the shortage of social

workers was clearly documented through Senate Bill 2030 - Workload Study and the Human Service Committee Legislative Hearings in 2001 (California Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work and the California Social Work Education Center, 2004).

The Distributed Learning (DL) option was added to the CSU Chico BSW Program in 2012. It was preceded by two separate attempts to make BSW education more accessible to geographically-isolated county child welfare and mental health personnel. The first attempt was the part-time BSW program that was started in 2004 and graduated only three students. The second attempt was the Pathways program that started in 2005. This program was initiated with support from the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) and included a regional needs assessment as well as extensive outreach to the regional agencies and Native American communities. Its purpose was to identify, mentor, and financially support potential social work students in the North State for their transfer as upper division students to the CSU Chico BSW program. **The emphasis on North State candidates was based on the challenges regional agencies experienced in both recruiting and retaining social workers whose ties were outside the region.** The students were offered advising and financial supports for their education as they completed the necessary prerequisites at local community colleges for the transfer to the CSU, Chico BSW Program; the DL Program was initiated to provide an accessible BSW education.