

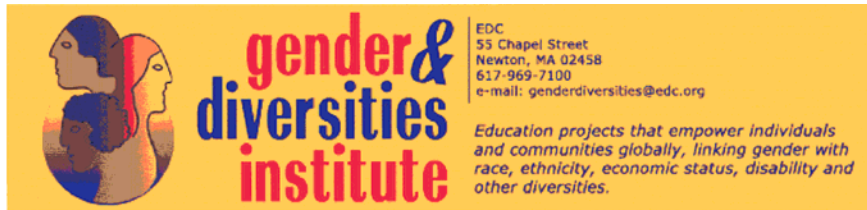
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Online educational tools and family violence prevention

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Gender violence affects individuals, families, and societies throughout the world, though it is defined and inflicted within specific cultures and communities. The United States Bureau of Justice estimates that one million women nationwide experience violence by an intimate partner each year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995). According to the United Nations Population Fund, at least one in three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some other way (UNFPA, 2000). As awareness of this issue continues to grow, faculty members at colleges and universities are beginning to recognize their unique role as educators in preventing gender violence. Instructors who prepare future professionals are a critical link to creating a workforce that can swiftly and effectively diagnose, intervene, and treat victims and perpetrators. Social service providers must know how to recognize and respond to families experiencing violence, law enforcement officers must understand legal rights and responsibilities in responding to violent incidents, and nurses and physicians must properly diagnose and treat victims. All must communicate and coordinate their services in order to prevent gaps. In preparing professionals, it is the role of the higher education faculty member to anticipate the skills needed by professionals and develop creative techniques for effectively teaching about gender violence prevention.

The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse (MINCAVA) specializes in developing creative ways to utilize technology in teaching about violence prevention. During the past several years, this work has changed significantly as teaching methods have been affected by the growth of technology and use of the World Wide Web. Suddenly, educational resources developed in a specific area can be instantly shared with others throughout the world. Individuals in one country can view and participate in conferences being held in other countries. Students can take courses offered at colleges far from where they live. Instructors are increasingly utilizing some form of technology in their classrooms in order to deliver lectures more clearly or vary their teaching



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techniques. As these technological developments have taken place, MINCAVA has developed a variety of methods to utilize online technology in supporting instructors and students. While the possibilities for using technology in education about violence are endless, some of the most effective methods appear below.

Developing online libraries of violence-related materials

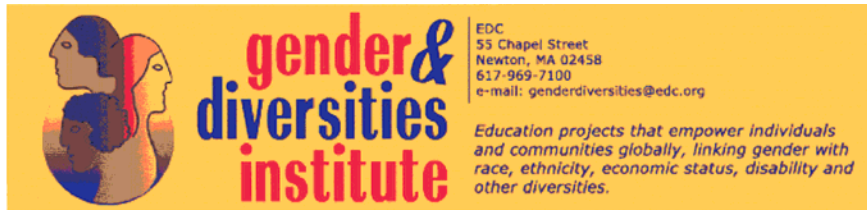
Through its MINCAVA Electronic Clearinghouse (www.mincava.umn.edu), MINCAVA provides an extensive pool of up-to-date educational resources about all types of violence, including higher education syllabi, published research, funding sources, upcoming training events, individuals and organizations that serve as resources, and searchable databases with over 700 training manuals, videos and other resources for classroom use. The site is used by over 1000 individuals each day who comprise an increasingly international audience from over sixty countries. Through the Clearinghouse, MINCAVA distributes research updates and online course materials related to its own educational programs and research.

MINCAVA also developed and maintains the Violence Against Women Online Resources web site on behalf of the United States Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office (www.vaw.umn.edu). The site provides law, criminal justice, advocacy, and social service professionals with up-to-date information on interventions to stop violence against women. The site houses over 100 full text documents that are reviewed by a national advisory board. Approximately 1,000 users per day also utilize this site to learn about stalking, domestic violence and sexual assault.

Online libraries provide professionals from around the world with immediate access to research and training materials. Educators can review curricula to use in the classroom, health care providers can find guidelines for speaking with patients experiencing violence, attorneys can locate standards of practice for domestic violence cases, etc. By providing materials that are easily accessed and printable, online libraries offer a broad set of resources and encourage users to utilize high-quality, research-tested resources to improve their practice.

Creating online tools for classrooms or individuals use

MINCAVA has created an online educational module called Global Violence Prevention. The site, located at (www.globalvp.umn.edu), is an interactive web site about family violence featuring a case study called “Angela’s Family”. The site includes a series of



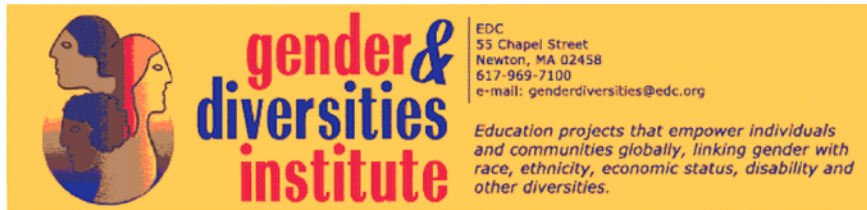
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multiple choice questions about the case, feedback based on how questions are answered and links to online research materials. The site's purpose is to train students and practitioners in service provision fields to respond more effectively to victims and perpetrators of violence. Global Violence Prevention was created in response to a request by Minnesota educators for interactive learning tools that could easily be inserted into a classroom syllabus. The site encourages students in all disciplines to think about how their actions affect not only the family with whom they are working, but also professionals in other fields. Each decision made by the student/user may affect subsequent actions of everyone in the case. The site is posted on the Internet so that instructors can insert the case into all types of courses about violence. The site is appropriate for professionals in the fields of education, social services, healthcare, and law enforcement. It is also appropriate for anyone seeking to learn more about domestic violence.

Global Violence Prevention is specific to current Minnesota legislation but it is serving as a model for training in other states and countries. Users are referred to articles and Minnesota statutes pertaining to mandated reporting requirements, appropriate interactions between physician and patient, and legal expectations of law enforcement officers. One hundred ninety-three users have evaluated the Global Violence Prevention site. Of these, 95% stated they "learned a lot from this case study", 96% stated "it was helpful for me to take the perspectives of different professionals", and 97% stated they would "recommend this site to others". This type of training tool has (1) ensured that violence content is being inserted into classrooms by instructors who may not take the time to create something on their own, (2) ensured that students in many disciplines are receiving the same information about working with families experiencing violence, and (3) taught students the roles and responsibilities of other types of professionals. Because it is posted online, the site can easily be updated to reflect new policies and laws.

Hosting discussion forums for practitioners and researchers to discuss current issues

During 2001-2002, MINCAVA and an interdisciplinary team of faculty at the University of Minnesota sponsored a seminar series titled "Developing a Collective Voice for Children". The series showcases current research and state-of-the-art curricula related to child abuse prevention and brings together University researchers and community practitioners for face-to-face discussion. Seminar topics include "Parent-Child Attachment: Applying the Research in Community Settings" and "Connections between



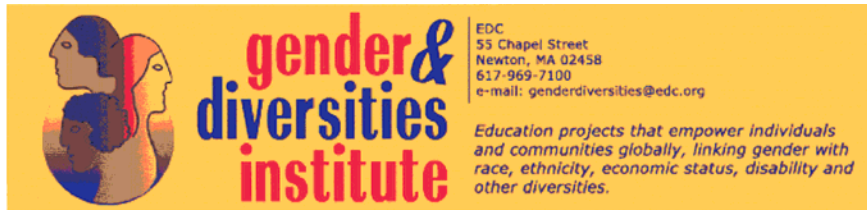
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Child Abuse, Youth Violence and Adult Domestic Violence: Developing a Prevention Agenda”. Most seminars featured one or two University researchers, a panel of practitioners and a question and answer period. The seminars were very well-attended and prompted much discussion between researchers and practitioners, as well as among all audience members. Participants remained in the room long after the presentation ended to continue these conversations. To support ongoing discussion between members of this interdisciplinary audience, MINCAVA created an online discussion forum as a medium for topic-specific conversations related to each session (www.mincava.umn.edu/CAPS/forum). This allowed for discussions begun at each seminar to continue online, and supported the project’s broad goal to promote interdisciplinary research and education about child abuse.

Offering trainings and courses online

MINCAVA houses the Child Abuse Prevention Studies (CAPS) program, a post-baccalaureate certificate designed to train interdisciplinary cohorts of practitioners about child maltreatment theory and research, program development and evaluation, legal issues related to child abuse, advocacy and specific issues related to working with diverse communities. During the past two years, CAPS staff members have received requests for CAPS distance training from people throughout Minnesota as well as North Dakota, Iowa, Colorado, North Carolina, Georgia, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Virginia, Florida, Ohio, India, Colombia, Japan, Malaysia, and Croatia. In order to meet the training needs of these students, two CAPS courses are being converted to a web-based method of delivery. Beginning fall 2002, students from around the world can register and complete the two courses entirely online. Students will be expected to keep up with the class activities assigned each week, which will consist of web-based learning modules, structured discussion forums, guest lectures through video streaming and related reading and research. It is expected that this curriculum will (1) meet the interests of a changing student population, particularly those students of non-traditional age who are interested in receiving formal graduate-level education, (2) provide new opportunities for incorporating interactive, interdisciplinary activities into courses, and (3) reach a large number of students in the most cost-effective manner.

This type of teaching, where students and working professionals take entire courses from a distance, has great impact to reach large audiences at relatively little cost. While the method of delivery presents challenges in maintaining interactivity between and among students and faculty, it also offers learning opportunities that are not possible in the



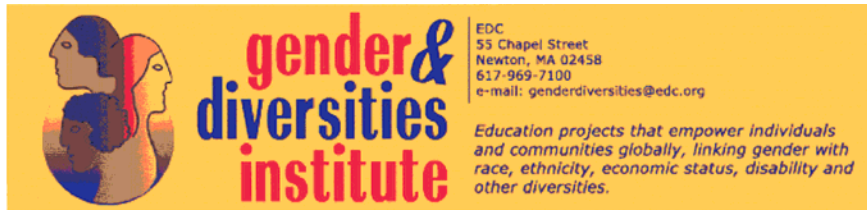
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regular classroom, for example, by including “guest lecturers” from geographically diverse areas through video streaming and online discussions. Online courses also permit instructors to require discussion from *all* student participants (not just a few outspoken people) and provide the structure (through email and online forums) for providing individualized feedback to every student.

Challenges and Recommendations

Developing technology-based educational products designed to prevent gender violence also comes with challenges. MINCAVA staff have identified several of these challenges and developed recommendations to meet them:

- Online learning tools are still new to higher education and development requires *allocation of time and financial resources*. Creating courses or course modules require that higher education institutions invest in new course software and staff support to create and enter data into course websites. Colleges and universities, as well as outside educational funding organizations, must recognize that initial costs of technology-infused education are far outweighed by the benefits of reaching a wide and diverse audience. Funders must also understand the need for easy-to-access research and educational materials and support organizations working to provide this.
- Not all potential users have access to educational materials online, and those who do may vary widely in their level of access to sophisticated online programs. Developers of online educational products must strike a *balance between utilizing state-of-the-art technology and maximizing access by all users*. While it is tempting to incorporate the most highly-sophisticated technology into new courses, this may leave behind many potential students who either don't have access to programs required to use the technology or have outdated programs that will not run efficiently. On the other hand, instructional designers must also avoid promoting wide access at the expense of sound pedagogical practice. The resulting weakened curriculum will probably result in lower enrollment after all.
- Service systems and funding sources are designed to respond to the aftermath of violence. Overall, the organizations designed to deal with violence do an adequate job of identifying victims, treating wounds, and punishing perpetrators. However, it is well-documented that prevention of violence is cheaper than costs incurred for treating, hospitalizing and incarcerating. Higher education officials and educational funding organizations must *emphasize that education is an*



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- important form of prevention.* By preparing teachers, social workers, health care providers, and law-related professionals with strong knowledge and effective skills, the higher education instructor indirectly affects all their students, clients and patients.
- No one profession can effectively respond to all issues related to gender violence or the problem would have long since been resolved. Our educational institutions need *to create an interdisciplinary focus* by teaching students how to work with individuals in other fields and how to understand their conceptual approaches to this topic. Higher education institutions must provide support for members of different disciplines to conduct research together, develop interdisciplinary courses, and jointly set the agenda for violence education program.

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