

GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE NOTICE

Please Post

The following dissertation presentation is scheduled and open
to those in the University Community

Elizabeth Cheng Tolmie, Candidate

Susan Brody Hasazi, Ed.D., Advisor

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

March 6, 2008

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

427A Waterman Building

Title: A Case Study of Organizational Change Strategies and Outcomes:
Initiation of a Field Services Division within the
Vermont Agency of Human Services

ABSTRACT

The restructuring and reorganization of governmental organizations is a frequent occurrence in the human service sector. During the past decades, the literature has indicated that numerous states located throughout the nation have been reforming their human service delivery systems (Annie E. Casey Foundation; Frumkin, Imershein, Chackerian, & Martin, 1983; Polivka, Imershein, White & Stivers, 1981; Ragan, 2003; Ragan with Nathan, 2002; Rockefeller Institute for Government). In 2004, the Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) joined this trend and began a reorganization effort of its own. This dissertation examines one aspect of the larger restructuring effort: the creation of a Field Services Division (FSD) within AHS. The organization of the FSD included placement of key leadership positions, known as Field Services Directors in each of the twelve regions of Vermont. This new management structure was intended to provide AHS leadership at the local level, and assist with transformation of AHS' human services delivery system towards a model of service integration. This study explores the perspectives of the policy executives and field directors who were charged with visioning and implementing human service reforms in Vermont.

The research employs a mixed-method, user-focused evaluative case study and survey approach (Patton, 2002; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001) to examine the organizational change strategies, processes, and perceived outcomes related to the FSD initiative. Findings indicate there have been successes and challenges associated with initiation of a FSD within AHS. While field directors were designated as agents of change, data supports that without further structural and system supports, service integration will not be easily achieved. Service coordination, consumer participation and development of community supports appear to offer the most promising practices in improving outcomes. This study also reveals that a local level of leadership offers promise in devising and implementing policy changes to improve human service delivery.

The study informs future evaluations about the opportunities, challenges and paradoxes in human service reform efforts. The project contributes to the literature regarding organizational change and human service integration, and suggests areas for future research. In addition, the analysis provides a framework to assist AHS in understanding the limitations and possibilities associated with this organizational change effort. Finally, it provides descriptive research with which to support continued improvement in the delivery of human services in Vermont.

This dissertation research was supported by the Vermont Research Partnership; a collaborative research endeavor which aims to study and improve the effectiveness of collaborative, community-based initiatives of the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, the University of Vermont and the Vermont Association of Regional Partnerships.