



FEBRUARY 2025

INSPIRING STUDENT ADVOCACY & ACTION AT THE NEW MEXICO LEGISLATURE: SANA 2025

New Mexico Highlands University's (NMHU) Facundo Valdez School of Social Work, through its Center for Excellence in Social Work, is excited to announce the upcoming Student Advocacy & Action Day (SANA) at the State Legislature on February 26, 2025, with an afternoon speakers series at the Santa Fe Higher Education Center.

This significant event aims to empower students by engaging them in the legislative process, helping them develop essential advocacy skills, and facilitating connections that support their professional aspirations and community goals.

Dr. Anna Nelson, Interim Dean of the Facundo Valdez School of Social Work, said: "This event is open to students in social work, behavioral health, and related fields, aiming to inspire the next generation of advocates with the tools to navigate and influence the legislative process."

Valerie Valles-Pedroza, Interim Director for the Center for Excellence in Social Work, highlighted the event's reach: "Over 75 students have already registered from various institutions, including Central New Mexico Community College, New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico State University, Western New Mexico University, and Eastern New Mexico University, as well as students from out-of-state institutions like Arizona State University."

The goals of SANA Day are multi-faceted, focusing on student empowerment, networking, and education. In the morning, students will have the opportunity to attend Behavioral Health Day events, observe the legislative session in action, visit legislative offices, and explore their policy interests with the support of mentors and peers. SANA leaders will share their expertise and assist students in small groups while they navigate the legislative landscape together. This will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of how laws are shaped and how they can influence the process.

Valles-Pedroza noted that "SANA provides a platform for students to reflect on the legislative issues that matter most to

them and develop strategies for meaningful action. Those enrolled in policy or advocacy classes will have a practical opportunity to apply their coursework to real-world scenarios."

In the afternoon, students will have the opportunity to network and connect over lunch at the Santa Fe Higher Education Center. They will hear from local leaders, Jen Panhorst, LCSW, Interim Director at UNM's School of Social Work, Gabriel Alarcon, Community Organizer at Somos Un Pueblo Unido, and Representative Eleanor Chávez.

Valles-Pedroza further explained, "SANA Day aims to create a long-term impact by providing guidance on how students can continue their advocacy efforts through community organization, connecting with local leaders, or pursuing legislative action on issues they are passionate about."

One student participant underscored the value of understanding how to engage with lawmakers directly: "As a future social worker, understanding legislation and policy is imperative to effectively advocate for the individuals and communities I serve. While my primary focus is on micro-level practice and direct client support, I recognize that true advocacy extends beyond individual interventions to systemic change."

Dr. Nelson emphasized that SANA Day is a pivotal opportunity for students to embark on their journey as engaged citizens and advocates. The program goes beyond learning about legislative processes; it fosters meaningful connections with mentors, peers, and community leaders who are equally passionate about social justice and community well-being. It not only empowers students to understand their role in shaping policies but also inspires them to become active agents of change in their communities.

For more information about the Center for Excellence in Social Work, including SANA Day, please visit fvssw.org/cesw or watch the promotional video at bit.ly/SANA-DAY. Join us in empowering the next generation of advocates!

