

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT (DCD) - MODIFIED
FIELD INSTRUCTION PROGRAM**
*AN ADAPTIVE INITIATIVE TO
SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND PARTNERSHIP
IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC*

DCD-FIP Committee¹

Abstract

The Field Instruction Program or FIP is the “heart and soul” of Community Development as an academic program. The FIP cannot be substituted by any other activity and student participation in the program is essential and non-negotiable. The continuing and emergent realities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing global, regional, and national response, particularly its impact on poor and marginalized communities, have compelled the FIP to facilitate opportunities for students and faculty to continue to live, work, and learn with them, in creative and multifaceted ways—through the Modified Field Instruction Program. The feature article provides a description of the Modified FIP bubble and remote modes, narrates initial experiences from the ground (and digital cloud), and shares preliminary learning from reflecting on these experiences. The article aims to provide a take-off point for continuing reflection and discussions to inform decisions of CD educators on the choice of methods and technologies that are appropriate to the context while remaining fully rooted on the twin imperatives of learning and service.

Keywords: field instruction, blended learning, service learning

Introduction

The Department of Community Development-Field Instruction Program (DCD-FIP) under the University of the Philippines' College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD) has discerned and resolved how it is going to emerge out of the dystopia brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic. This was necessitated by the abrupt shift to virtual, online, and remote modes of teaching and learning in the whole UP System in March 2020 (and extended further as of this writing) "in light of the enhanced community quarantine over the entire Luzon (and) in other regions of the country" (OVPA² Memo No. 2020-38). The FIP (also called Fieldwork Program), an academic requirement in the undergraduate and graduate Community Development (CD) curricula, had to be temporarily suspended and deferred for two terms (Midyear 2020 up to the First Semester, AY 2020-2021) due to the continuing lockdowns. Moreover, the CD faculty also recognized the lack of appropriate internal processes for ensuring safety and well-being of students, community members, faculty, and staff that is commensurate to the massive scale of a health pandemic. Hence, the DCD embarked on redesigning the program in search of more adaptive modes of social solidarity engagement and partnership, thus paving the way to the Modified Field Instruction Program.

Meanwhile, the global reset epiphany borne by the world health crisis, compounded by stringent mobility restrictions and health authoritarianism imposed by State authorities, has ushered in an entirely different manner of fostering social interaction, connection, and solidarity. Such a historical threshold has posed a critical interregnum in our development endeavors, especially for communities and their members. This posed great challenges to existing ways of working and impelled care and service providers to explore new and innovative methods that did not rely heavily on face-to-face social interaction, integration, and real time and space immersion into the lives of communities, and pushed the transition into the online, virtual, digital cloud platform.

FIP: "heart and soul" of the CD academic program

The FIP has always been regarded as the "heart and soul" of the CD academic program. As a practice-based discipline, the CD curricula "promote praxis-oriented education that is anchored on the inextricable connection of theoretical knowledge and social practice" (FIP Manual, 2019, p. 10). This complementation of theory and practice is critical in

fostering the transformative agenda of the CD discipline. For more than five decades, the FIP has served as the bedrock for the formation of competent and socially committed CD professionals. Taken on their senior year prior to graduation, the FIP is an indispensable phase in the preparation for the CD profession as it provides opportunities for students to apply, reflect on, and critically analyze CD concepts, principles, and strategies to real-life situations. For undergraduate students, the FIP is a one-year community engagement requiring a minimum of 750 hours of community-based work per semester. This entails living with, participating, and working together with the community in their daily routines in order to experience and understand the dynamics of their community life. For graduate students, it is a shorter, yet equally intensive immersion for one semester requiring a minimum of 250 hours of integrating, working, and learning with the people in the communities. The FIP experience provides a foretaste of the students' future life careers and is, in truth, a prelude to their life-long commitment as development professionals. Hence, field instruction cannot be substituted by any other learning activity. Participation in this academic endeavor is required and considered non-negotiable in order for students to earn their respective CD degrees.

Poverty and inequality exacerbated by the impacts of the current global and national health crises and by the inept politico-militarist response of State authorities underscore the relevance of continuing engagement with grassroots communities and civil society organizations. The FIP's partner communities, which are mostly located outside UP Diliman, and organizations have continued to carry out emergency response activities since AY 2019-2020 to address pressing COVID-19-related concerns on top of their regular development programs and projects. The continuing and emergent realities in these communities have pushed the FIP to facilitate opportunities for students and faculty to continue to work and learn with them in creative and multifaceted ways.

The Modified Field Instruction Program

The considerations mentioned above served as compelling reasons for the FIP Committee, together with the rest of the DCD Faculty and incoming FIP students, to conceive a limited and interim **Modified Field Instruction Program** to be offered in the Second Semester, AY 2020-2021. The Modified FIP has two modes. The first, the **Modified FIP "Bubble" Mode**, will attempt to work with communities inside the UP Diliman Campus and with the different UPD Task Forces, in cooperation with the

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Community Affairs (OVCCA), which are working to ensure that the health crisis is managed or mitigated, given the health protocols and restrictions on mobility imposed by the government. As such, the FIP students will be participating in the UPD community programs, essentially serving as community *pahinungods* or volunteers, while concretizing the Program's academic mandate of meaningful learning and public service. This arrangement is taking a cue from former UPD Chancellor, Dr. Michael L. Tan, who espoused the nurturing of our own UP Diliman community, when he stated: "...we always look OUTSIDE of our fence. Why don't we also look INSIDE our own fence?"

The second, the **Modified FIP "Remote" Mode**, was conceived primarily for graduate students who already have experience in fieldwork and in working with communities. While utilizing online and virtual platforms, this mode still means full-time work akin to face-to-face fieldwork.

While these modifications in the mode of the FIP were being conceptualized, the three interrelated objectives of the Program were unanimously affirmed by both CD faculty and students as well as partner communities and organizations. Whether the mode would be that of a modified bubble or remote, the FIP must continue to: a) promote student learning and commitment building, b) extend service to community/partner agencies/organizations and social movements, and c) contribute to the growth and development of CD curricular programs.

Furthermore, while adaptations in the delivery mode of the FIP were put in place, the redesign still endeavored to meet the minimum requirement of 750 hours of community-engaged work for undergraduate students and 250 hours for graduate students (FIP Manual, 2019, p. 27). The Modified FIP still retains its division into three main phases, but with some adjustments. The first is the *preparatory phase* which would include mandatory COVID-19 swab tests, quarantine procedures, and orientations on COVID-19 health and safety protocols and standards, on top of the regular orientations on the FIP, managing stress, and security. Second would be the *integration phase*, the bulk of the FIP period. This would include direct, albeit limited, community engagements subject to existing guidelines of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases, the local government unit (LGU), and UP. Last would be the *end-semester phase*. This would include assessments, critical reflections, and generating new knowledge and learning from the

whole experience through the *Paglikom* Faculty-Student Conference on CD Practice. There would be no mid-semester sharing, as previously practiced, but there would be continuing team-level consultations as needed.

The Modified FIP “Bubble” Mode. The objective of this mode is to reduce and manage the risks of students, faculty, and partners getting infected with COVID-19 by reducing, but not eliminating, possible points of contact, such as meetings and interactions during the regular community interface. The FIP “bubble” mode would necessitate the strict observance of standard or minimum health protocols such as, but not limited to, proper wearing of masks and physical distancing. These would be prudently observed to avoid the misperception among community members that they are being avoided.

The decision to focus on the communities within the UP Diliman Campus is both practical and strategic. On the practical side, deploying FIP students inside the campus would be easier to monitor and manage, and would allow for access to existing institutional support such as health services, isolation facilities, and residential facilities. To make this work, the FIP would have to continue to strengthen its coordination with the OVCCA, particularly the Office for Community Relations (OCR); the University Health Service, particularly the Public Health Unit; and the Office for Student Affairs, particularly the dormitory services. Strategically, this would provide opportunities for a more sustained effort in working with these on-campus communities and organizations. It would also open possibilities for longer-term partnerships going beyond the current pandemic.

FIP policies were also adapted to be more responsive to the pandemic context. For example, an integral feature of the pre-pandemic FIP had required students to live with host families in the community. This requirement would be temporarily shelved and students would be housed in a dormitory inside the UPD Campus. Students would also be required to stay in-campus for the duration of the FIP and at no instance would they be allowed to leave the “bubble,” except in cases of emergency. Participation in activities at the household and community levels may still be pursued, although on a limited scale and frequency and duration would be calibrated to ensure safety. Additional health and safety protocols would also be put in place on top of the existing protocols within UP Diliman.

All these, of course, are based on the assumption that the general health situation would turn for the better and that community quarantine restrictions would be eased. These are also contingent on approval being obtained for limited face-to-face interactions or field activities, coursed through the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and granted by the IATF.

The Modified FIP “Remote” Mode. In many ways, the transition to a “Remote FIP” would be more challenging and seemingly counterintuitive. With the promotion of physical distancing as one of the key measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as well as other means such as community quarantines, lockdowns, and travel restrictions, the idea of re-evaluating community integration as-we-know-it came to the fore during the conceptualization process. Some of the questions that the FIP Committee and the CD faculty as a whole considered were: How can community integration be possible if we do not go to the community? Are there “new ways” of integrating with communities? Can the use of virtual or online platforms be deemed as one such “new way”? Can there be a hybrid form of integration, a mix of the old and the new? Can the fundamental orientation, values, and principles of integration-as-we-know-it still be upheld in such “new ways” of doing? How can we say that students have fully integrated with communities in such a scenario? Can “being in solidarity with” be done using remote or virtual means? How can we participate in people’s collective actions without physical face-to-face encounters?

The DCD grappled with these questions and came up with additional policies and interim arrangements for the “Remote FIP.” First, the partner communities would have to express their willingness to host FIP students using a remote mode. Second, the partner communities and organizations would need to have the basic technical and technological capacities and skills to engage in remote learning. Third, due diligence would also be required on the part of the FIP Committee in the interview process to ensure that only students with relatively good/extensive experiences in being engaged in development work with communities would be assigned to this mode. Fourth, the students would need to decide if they would like to be assigned for remote FIP, considering that all of them have been gearing up for fieldwork in various urban and rural communities. Fifth, the remote mode would still be considered and credited as a full-time FIP, i.e., the schedules for synchronous and asynchronous activities would be dependent on the schedules of the

partner communities/organizations and, as such, would be given high priority and be strictly adhered to by the students each day. Sixth, processes and outputs would stem from and be in support of the initiatives of the partner communities and organizations. Lastly, while the main mode would be online or virtual, the students assigned for “Remote FIP” would undergo a minimum of one-day immersion in the field site to be scheduled at an opportune time within the semester. This last element was seen as necessary to ensure better grounding of the students in the community experience.

Resuming the FIP for the Second Semester, AY 2020-2021

The DCD’s resumption of the FIP during the Second Semester of AY 2020-2021 is a categorical attempt to compensate for deferring its offering during the Midyear AY 2019-2020 and the First Semester AY 2020-2021, thereby delaying the graduation of some of our students. Undeniably, the interim arrangements discussed above pose a unique challenge to the FIP—finding the balance in ensuring the health, safety, and security of stakeholders in the FIP while remaining relevant and true to its tradition of praxis-oriented learning and genuine service geared towards transformative development. Nonetheless, the DCD was also cognizant of the fact that it needed to put in place more specific policies, mechanisms, and guidelines for the Program to be sanctioned, including health and safety protocols for strict observance of students undergoing the Modified FIP whether through the “Bubble” or “Remote” modes.

In preparation for the second semester, the OVCAA issued an urgent reminder to all academic units, dated 24 September 2020, reiterating that no face-to-face classes were to be held, and that face-to-face class activities such as field work, field school, internship, OJT, and the like were also inoperative until these are given approval by the UP Board of Regents, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the IATF. Thus, on 23 November 2020, the DCD submitted an official request to the higher bodies, through channels, for approval to offer the Modified FIP Program by the Second Semester, AY 2020-2021. As of the start of the semester in March 2021, the request was allegedly endorsed for favorable action. With this in mind and the urgent need to address the significant delays in the graduation of students in both the undergraduate and graduate CD programs, the DCD offered the Modified FIP.

Twenty-six students were enrolled in the FIP, and majority of them were assigned to the “Bubble FIP” in UP Diliman. Six graduate students were assigned to the “Remote FIP.” With the approval of the official request still pending, the activities of the students in the “Bubble” mode were limited to the completion of the mandatory RT-PCR testing for COVID-19 and the mandatory quarantine period. Orientation sessions and initial planning meetings via Zoom were also done in the confines of the dorms, using the internet connection available there. Everyone was indeed looking forward to the approval of the request, so that the planned limited face-to-face community engagements could already push through. However, the first few weeks of March also saw the start of a steady increase or spike in COVID-19 cases in the National Capital Region. With this, as well as the constant shifting of community quarantine categories, approval of the Modified FIP request became uncertain. As a result, the students assigned in the UP Diliman “Bubble” were sent home to avert any risks from the surge in cases and the spike in infections. Likewise, the limited immersion in partner communities in Floridablanca, Pampanga and in Sta. Rosa, Laguna being planned by students assigned in the Remote FIP was also cancelled. This marked the transition of the Modified FIP towards full remote delivery using online and mobile technology.

Modified FIP thriving adaptively in the current social predicament

The continuing quarantine shifts, however, also served to make the Modified FIP dynamic and adaptive. The resulting creativity and innovation of the FIP provide a glimmer of hope, demonstrating the capacity to adjust and thrive and not succumb to the authoritarian health restrictions.

As of this writing, the FIP students are still well in place with their fieldwork with community partners, enthusiastically continuing what had been initially planned in the early stages of the Modified FIP. The current semester will be ending in June 2021, the highlight of which will be the end-of-semester *Paglikom* where all the FIP teams together with CD faculty members will gather for an online conference on CD Practice. This would be the time to look back, critically reflect on, and draw learnings on Community Organizing and Community Development from the experiences in the Modified FIP over the past months. These lessons, alongside questions that continue to be raised in different conversations, will serve as platforms for further reflection and action towards continually adapting and innovating to keep the FIP relevant as the pandemic situation

remains unstable. In this manner, the FIP will continue to be a wellspring of effective learning and instruction, applying concepts and strategies that nurture the growth of CD as a profession and as a discipline. The succeeding section will present some of the initial achievements in working with community partners in the Modified FIP, as well as some of the challenges faced and learnings drawn from this initial run.

Modified FIP Bubble in UP Diliman. The “Bubble FIP” teams started out well, particularly with the added health and safety protocols (e.g., RT-PCR testing, quarantine periods) and online orientations; and was on track while awaiting the IATF approval of the request to be allowed to engage in limited, face-to-face activities with partner organizations and communities inside the UP Campus. Shortly after the start of the semester, however, the spike in COVID-19 cases and the heightened restrictions that followed forced the FIP to decide to suspend the bubble mode and shift to a full virtual/remote mode. Nevertheless, the nine BSCD FIP students continued working with the six jeepney drivers’ associations plying the UP Diliman route—IKOT, TOKI, Philcoa, Pantranco, SM North, and Katipunan—and continued coordinating with the Pantawid sa mga Naghahatid, an ad hoc group of UP Diliman alumni who had been providing relief assistance to the drivers whose main sources of livelihoods were displaced since the start of the pandemic in 2020. Internet-based applications and mobile phones were utilized for conversations, consultations, coordination, validation of information, planning, and education activities among others, in pursuit of several objectives: 1) distribution of cash assistance to members of the six associations, 2) enhancing and managing association and transport group-level resource mobilization and relief assistance, 3) linking with other groups and organizations for livelihood development, and 4) promoting the peoples’ right to health services, particularly on accessing vaccination for COVID-19.

The nine MCD FIP students, on the other hand, carried on working with the Pook Arboretum community. The initial introduction to the community was done through the UPD Office of Community Relations, which was also looking for additional human resources to help them carry out a census they are planning to undertake in relation to the proposed construction of a UP-PGH Diliman Project in Pook Arboretum. With the cancellation of the planned face-to-face activities, the MCD team focused on its original objective of coming up with a research project to better understand the conditions, issues, and aspirations of the Pook

Arboretum community to serve as a basis for recommending “policy reforms or improvements in project implementation to improve and strengthen the relationship between UP and the community” (Alcantara et al., 2021). They also shifted to the use of mobile technology to get in touch with community leaders and members, develop additional contacts, and to gather data in general as internet connectivity was also a challenge. To date, the objectives of these two teams in the modified FIP bubble mode have already been completed or are on track for completion in the remaining weeks of the semester.

Modified FIP Remote Mode. Two MCD teams were assigned under the “Remote FIP.” Unlike the two teams under the “bubble” scheme, the teams on remote mode were able to immediately start their preparatory activities with the identified partners since they did not need to undergo COVID-19 health and safety protocols. A team of three MCD students was assigned to work with six Ayta students from Sitio Camachile, Brgy. Nabuklod, Floridablanca, Pampanga. The opportunity to work with the Ayta students came about upon the invitation of the St. Vincent School of Theology (SVST) which was already engaged in providing scholarship assistance to the Ayta community in Sitio Camachili. SVST had also set up a learning center in the community, which was recently fitted with an internet connection to support the learning needs of the Ayta students. The FIP team was therefore able to utilize online platforms (e.g., Zoom and FB Messenger) to provide tutorial support to the Ayta students, as well as to provide avenues for the sharing of experiences and the challenges they faced in going to school as an Ayta. Regular consultations and coordination with SVST were also done through online means. All in all, the experience provided the FIP team with a deeper understanding and better appreciation of the situation and struggles of the Ayta students.

Another team of three MCD students was assigned to work with MASIPAG (Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura), an existing and long-time FIP partner network of small-scale farmers. Several teams of undergraduate CD students had already worked with MASIPAG and several communities in Gen. Nakar and Real in Quezon province prior to the 2020 pandemic. MASIPAG expressed willingness to host FIP students on remote mode to help them in organizational development and development of online training modules among others. As in the case of SVST in Floridablanca, Pampanga, MASIPAG had set up a communications hub where online learning sessions could be done for the communities and farmers’ organizations they are working with.

The FIP team eventually focused on working with MASIPAG on their Tumandok online campaign and on an agroecology research with six people's organizations and MASIPAG staff. Initial feedback from the FIP team indicated that the experience provided them a chance to know the community leaders and farmer-scientists within the limits of online interaction sans face-to-face community integration.

Challenges and initial learnings. While the end-of-semester sharing, reflection, and summing-up is yet to be completed, several challenges and learnings from the initial run of the Modified FIP can already be shared. As conceived, Field Instruction “seeks to provide opportunities for students to apply CD concepts, principles, approaches and strategies to real-life situations, making the society and particular rural and urban communities the bigger classroom for weaving theory and practice into one coherent whole” (FIP Manual, 2019, p. 10, emphasis added). Community integration, *pakikiisa at pakikipamuhay*, and being in solidarity with the people is an essential element of the CD discipline. Adhering to this fundamental principle constituted one of the first challenges faced in the Modified FIP. The communities are the “bigger classroom” of the FIP, but current restrictions have rendered these physically inaccessible to the students. Hence, the idea of a Modified FIP Bubble Mode, in this case within the UP Diliman Campus, and short community visits for the Modified FIP Remote Mode to allow for face-to-face interactions with partner communities even in a limited fashion. To ensure health safety and security, guidelines were formulated for the FIP to minimize risks for students, faculty, and support personnel as well as for the people in the community. With all of these in place, the DCD sought official permission from the IATF, through designated channels, for students to be allowed to do fieldwork. While approval had not yet been granted as of the second semester of AY 2020-2021, the necessity of pushing for the Modified FIP remains. Community Development practitioners and social workers are frontline workers both prior to and during this pandemic, engaging with communities and organizations in education, capacity building, resource mobilization, ensuring access to basic services, planning community-level responses, advocacy and the like. Thus, being allowed to do fieldwork subject to additional health safety and security guidelines and protocols will help FIP students achieve key learning outcomes and enable them to extend service to partner communities during this crisis situation.

The precariousness of the situation, compounded by the continuing politico-militarist approach of the government to the pandemic, continues to pose a major challenge in planning for and implementing the Modified FIP. While the added health protocols and guidelines for the Bubble FIP in UP Diliman were implemented at the start of the semester, the sudden spike in COVID-19 cases towards the end of March 2021 and the further tightening of mobility restrictions that came with that meant that the bubble scheme had to shift to virtual and remote modes. Plans made around the assumption that the bubble FIP team would be allowed limited face-to-face community engagement had to be redrawn. An important element in the process of redrawing is addressing the real-life situation—dealing with “what is” rather than dwelling on “what we wish” were in place. In retrospect, agility in planning for different scenarios that may arise to account for the unpredictability of and constantly shifting contexts remains an important ability of the Modified FIP. It must be noted, however, that one of the shifts in context (i.e., the sudden spike in COVID-19 cases), had a comparatively milder impact on the “remote FIP” than it did on the “bubble FIP.” This being said, however, the heightened mobility restrictions did impede movements of community leaders to and from the communication/online learning hubs, e.g., some focus group discussions (FGDs) were cancelled due to localized lockdowns. Furthermore, the pandemic situation also impacted on everyone’s mental health and overall well-being.

The Modified FIP—be it bubble mode or remote mode—also signaled the shift towards a more intensive use of mobile and internet-based applications not only for communication but also for integration and solidarity building with partner communities. This shift highlighted the reality of inequality of access to such technologies, which was manifested in several ways during the Modified FIP. On the part of the FIP students in the UP Diliman “bubble,” for example, they had to contend with the weak internet connection in the dorms which hampered their ability to communicate with community partners and even conduct team meetings and planning. On the part of the community partners, it was not only an issue of weak connectivity, but even not having the necessary hardware, e.g., smartphones, laptops or even desktop computers. Apart from poor internet and hardware issues, relying on mobile and internet technology for communication comes at a high cost. Continued reliance on these technologies in the Modified FIP would mean having to find ways to address these issues. The experience with SVST and MASIPAG, which had both established communication and e-learning hubs in their partner communities, provides an alternative approach that can

be considered in the succeeding runs of the Modified FIP. Perhaps this is something that the DCD, and the CSWCD in general, would have to explore with its partner communities and organizations.

Lastly, the May 2021 pronouncement by CHED Commissioner Prospero de Vera that flexible or blended learning will be the norm in the coming years poses a continuing challenge to the FIP, the Department of Community Development, and the College of Social Work and Community Development in general. Nevertheless, as Bawagan and Tungpalan (2010) noted, the DCD-FIP is poised to take on this challenge as the program has always been in pursuit of appropriate learning theories and methods to improve our instruction and learning outcomes. Drawing on the collective experiences and learning of the DCD-FIP, including those of the past few months under the modified modes, will help the program in deciding on the appropriate balance of theories, methods, and technologies to optimize learning (Cronje, 2021) in the ongoing and shifting context of the pandemic. However, the choice of instructional methods and technologies that are appropriate to the context must remain fully rooted on the twin imperatives of learning and service.

End Notes

¹ The FIP Committee is composed of the DCD Chair (as Ex-Officio member), the FIP Coordinator as Head, CD faculty fieldwork supervisors, and instructors of field-based courses. The members of the FIP Committee for AY 2020-2021 are the following:

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