

FIELD EDUCATION

Educational Planning

Overview

In order to achieve the objectives of field education, it is essential for the field instructor to develop an educational plan. The first step in formulating this plan is to develop a supervisory contract. Student and supervisor discuss the student's experience, past supervision, professional interests, and learning goals, as well as curriculum requirements and evaluation criteria. From this, supervisor and student enter into a contract.

The educational contract delineates the following mutual expectations:

1. Number and type of assignments
2. Recording requirements
3. Schedule and format of supervision
4. Educational goals for the semester and the year

This contract will be written by the field instructor and submitted to the faculty adviser. It serves as an important guide for the student and field instructor throughout the year. The educational contract is elastic in that it is open to negotiation as new learning needs arise throughout the year. The educational plan also takes into account the student's tempo of learning. It indicates how the field instructor will help students use professional strengths to achieve agreed upon learning objectives. It is highly recommended that the student be given assignments and meet some of their clients as soon as possible. It is recommended that early reading of records by the student be limited to those for which the student will be responsible. The faculty adviser provides an educational plan for the field supervisor and student to complete.

Student Process Recording

Process recordings are an essential tool for both learning and teaching the practice of social work. Student written work enables the field instructor to make an adequate educational assessment of the student and helps the student reorganize his/her learning needs. The faculty adviser will also review samples of student process recordings with the student to assess their progress.

For the baccalaureate program student, process recording is essential to inform the field instructor about what the student is doing with clients. One or two process recordings per week are required throughout the placement. Other techniques for direct monitoring of student work such as audio tape and videotape may be used to supplement, but not replace, process recording. Students should also be taught how to write case summaries, letters, statistical reports, and other records germane to the agency's program. Process recordings and other materials should be kept in a secure place in the agency in order to insure confidentiality.

Process recording is a teaching method utilizing a detailed written description of what occurs during a client(s)/student contact. At the beginning of the academic year, students and field instructors are given our process recording manual that details the structure of process recordings and provides numerous examples of well-structured recordings.

All process recordings, regardless of format or size of client system, include the verbatim exchange of what transpired during the session. Process recordings should be required for a variety of students'

assignments, and when possible, should include group, family, and community sessions in addition to individual contacts.

Student Journaling

Throughout the field work year, students will be required to submit reflective journal entries to their integrative seminar instructor on specific field education issues.

Student Field Evaluations

Evaluation is an important part of the educational process and should be ongoing throughout the year. Written evaluations are done twice yearly, shortly before the end of each semester. These formal evaluations enable the program and the student to see how well the student is applying social work knowledge, values, and principles to practice. They provide the opportunity for both field instructor and student to take stock of the student's skill development and of the supervisory process. The evaluation form also serves as a planning tool. The list of skills contained in the evaluation can guide the field instructor in making assignments and monitoring the student's work.

Written Evaluation

The program provides forms for the written evaluation that is submitted electronically, containing checklist and narrative components. Evaluations should be discussed jointly after the student and field instructor have each reviewed the semester's work and the evaluation form. However, while the student should have input into the process, it is the field instructor's evaluation. Following mutual discussion, the field instructor writes the evaluation and reviews it with the student. Students are expected to achieve a rating of "Competent" in most skill areas.

The written evaluation is divided into sections that address engagement skills, data collection, contracting, intervention and case management skills, and supervisory and professional relationships. Students are given a final rating that includes outstanding, very good, satisfactory, marginal passing, and unsatisfactory performance.

- An **ADVANCED COMPETENCY** rating is given to students who have demonstrated superlative performance in the field, highly integrating classroom and practice skills with a strongly developed, consistent "conscious use of self."
- A **COMPETENT** rating is given to students who fulfill the learning assignments in the field assignment but at a beginning level.
- An **APPROACHING COMPETENCY** rating is given to students who demonstrate an understanding of practice skills but are very uneven and tentative in their demonstration of skills in practice. There may be difficulties in the supervisory or professional relationship that warrant this assessment.
- An **UNSATISFACTORY** rating is given to students who do not understand nor are they able to utilize social work skills in practice. They may demonstrate a substantial ethical gap in their social work skills and may demonstrate major difficulties in the relationships with supervisors and professional colleagues.

The student is presented with the completed evaluation and is asked to sign the evaluation, indicating only that it has been read. Field instructors may decide to have a final discussion about the particular ratings and comments, particularly if there is some disagreement.

At the end of each semester, students independently evaluate the field practicum experience as part of the integrative seminar. This evaluation

focuses on the student's assessment of his/her progress, the agency environment for learning, and the contributions of their field instructor.

Grading of Students in Field Education

Field education is a year-long course and is graded by the faculty adviser on a pass/fail basis. At the end of the first semester, if the student is progressing well, a grade of In Progress (IP) is given. Grades of satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U) are given upon completion of the course, i.e., at the completion of the 420 hours, in May for 21-hour/week students and in August for 14-hour/week students. Since field education is a full year course, no credit can be given if a student withdraws before the end of the academic year.

The faculty adviser relies heavily, though not exclusively, on the written evaluation from the field supervisor in assigning a field work grade. Other factors that are taken into consideration are:

1. Other information from the supervisor and other personnel at the time of the field visit
2. Student's process recordings and reflective journaling
3. Information from individual conferences
4. First-hand observation in the integrative seminar
5. Feedback from classroom instructors

Program students are expected to maintain performance standards in the field practicum, as well as in the social work classroom. The full policy describing the maintenance of satisfactory progress in the program and the "program continuance review" mechanism appear in the policy and procedures section of this document.

In the Event of a Problem

A learning problem is that which impedes a student's understanding, acceptance, and use of knowledge in their professional performance. There are multiple circumstances that might result in a learning problem. For example, a learning problem may result from a student's individual reactions, cognitive style, or approach to new learning situations. The learning problem may also be the result of a difficult match between supervisor/agency and student. It is important to get to the root of the problem in order to determine an appropriate solution.

The field instructor is expected to discuss, as part of the educational process, the student's emotional reactions, with focus on the case material, as they affect their ability to work with clients. If it becomes apparent that the student has difficulties or any other problems that interfere seriously with training, the field instructor has the responsibility to bring this assessment to the faculty adviser. After reviewing the situation with the field instructor and student, the faculty adviser may request an administrative review.

Students are rarely removed from agencies in the middle of the year. When this is necessary, it is only for serious educational reasons and only after the adviser has attempted to resolve the problem with both student and field instructor. It is important that students and field instructors work through the above process in resolving differences. In the midst of a frustrating situation in the agency, the field instructor or the student may be tempted to short circuit the process and terminate the placement prematurely. Such action makes it very difficult for the program to assess what went wrong and to plan appropriately for the student. The program established the field placement and must be a full partner in any decision to end it. In addition, when early and full use is made of the

faculty adviser, many placements that are in jeopardy can be turned into productive learning experiences.

In the case of an "unsatisfactory" evaluation from the field instructor, the faculty adviser has the following options:

1. To reject the unsatisfactory evaluation and give a "satisfactory" grade
2. At mid-year to reject the unsatisfactory evaluation and recommend replacement with the final grade to be determined on the basis of work in the new placement
3. To accept the evaluation and give an "unsatisfactory" (failing) grade in field work. A "program continuance review" meeting will be called, which may determine that the student may repeat the course, subject to availability of an agency, selected by the school, willing to accept the student. The student will be considered on probation and at risk. A placement with appropriate additional support and attention to the student will be sought.
4. To accept the evaluation and give an "unsatisfactory" (failing) grade. A "program continuance review" meeting will be called, and may recommend that the student be discontinued from the program.

There may be times when agencies are unable to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations as field placements. For example: the intended field instructor may leave with no replacement; the quantity or nature of assignments may not be appropriate for student learning; organizational reorganization may result in a chaotic situation; or agencies may be confronting severe external or internal demands and pressures as to present an obstacle to student learning. Under such circumstances, the faculty adviser in conjunction with the student and the program director will review the situation to determine if a change in placement is warranted.

Students with field related concerns are encouraged to confer with their field instructors. Should the concerns remain unresolved, they may confer with their faculty advisers and following that, the program director.