

## Criteria For Selecting Field Instruction Agencies



The selection of appropriate agencies is an extremely important process. Agencies are selected on their ability to provide students the opportunity to acquire practical professional experience, interact with professionals and receive direct and indirect practice activities, which shall result in professional entry-level social workers. The highest regard for the teaching/learning process must be demonstrated by the agency. Agency manpower needs within the agency can not guide student placement or assignments.

The following criteria are used to assess the agency's capability to provide appropriate field placements:

1. Commitment to active participation as a partner in professional education of A&M's Undergraduate Social Work students. This involves an acceptance of the NASW and NABSW Code of Ethics, the Program's educational curriculum and a willingness to devote time and effort in the Social Work training process. Student learning is enhanced through the cooperation of faculty and agency personnel.
2. Ability to provide MSW staff to serve as agency field instructors. Designated instructional staff is expected to have adequate time to devote to student learning.
3. Availability of an appropriate variety, quality, and quantity of practice learning experiences with individuals, groups, families, communities and organizations.
4. Provide adequate workspace for students. This includes privacy for interviewing, access to a telephone, a designated work area, resources necessary for home visits, dictation and other services.
5. Reimbursement for agency related travel.
6. Follow through with the student until the expiration of the learning contract.
7. Provide opportunities for learning experiences with staff, other social workers and professionals from other disciplines.
8. Has a clearly defined mission, objectives and organizational structure.

9. Recognized as a social service agency within the community for the past year and as a legitimate service program for six months with stable administrative/management staff.
10. Accepts the University-agency partnership in teaching students.
11. Accepts the mandate to serve diverse populations in Northern Alabama.
12. Willing to make available qualified agency task supervisors to supervise students.
13. Has sufficient manpower to implement the activities of the agency without relying on students for manpower.

## Contractual Agreement



The contract between the Field Instruction agencies and the Undergraduate Social Work Program is an agreement, which identifies the students assigned to the agency for a specified period of time. This form is signed by the agency and kept on file in the Program's office. The names of the parties to the agreement (school and agency) are listed on the form. The purpose of the agreement is to ensure a field placement arrangement is signed in the Fall after the agency has been confirmed as an actual field site.

**Affiliated** - An agreement has been reached between the agency and Program, which provides on-going field placement opportunities.

- Active - Affiliated agencies with current student placements.
- Inactive - Affiliated agencies with no current student assignments.

**Pending** - An agreement between the agency and Program are in the negotiation stage.

**Closed** – Agencies, which were used as field placements at one time, but are no longer used due to agency, Program or mutual request. No agreement is active or pending.

### Policy Statement on Qualifications of Agency Field Instruction Staff:

Given the changing demands on the profession throughout all fields of practice in social work, it is extremely important to offer emerging generalists the highest level of skill and knowledge available. Alabama A&M University's Undergraduate Social Work Program requires all of its majors to have master-level supervisors (MSWs) who are responsible

for the direct and primary instruction of the student at the placement site. When this is not possible, they are assigned to a task supervisor who is supervised by a MSW.

## **Criteria For Selecting Agency Field Instructors**



The criteria for selecting agency field instructors is as follows:

1. MSW with one-year professional practice experience.
2. Employment at agency for at least one year prior to becoming a field instructor.
3. Competence in practice as evidenced by references, if needed.
4. Agreement to participate in Field Instruction Seminars and Training which are provided by the Undergraduate Social Work Program for field instructors.
5. Sincere interest in teaching students as evidenced by a minimum of one hour of set aside field instruction time per week.
6. Interview to determine level of practice and interest in the education of Social Work students, if needed.
7. Have a commitment to the values and ethics of the social work profession.
8. Willingness to involve students in generalist activities with oppressed groups and impoverished populations in Northern Alabama.
9. Willingness to assist students to become acculturated into the Social Work profession through extra curricular professional activities (workshops, staff meetings, case conferences, board meetings).
10. Ability in providing teaching/learning experiences, which permit students to use knowledge from the foundation courses in field assignments.
11. Knowledge of community resources and the Social Welfare structure within geographical service area.
12. Desire to stimulate the personal and professional growth of students.

13. Submission of a current resume and or completion of the Undergraduate Program's vita form.

## **Criteria For Selecting Agency Task Supervisors**



The criteria for selecting agency task supervisors are as follows:

1. Bachelor's degree in human services, preferable social work, psychology, sociology, criminal justice or related discipline.
2. Five years experience in the human services, with the last two years at the field instruction agency.
3. Agency field instructor must be immediate supervisor in the same unit or agency.
4. Must meet standards 3-12 under criteria for agency field instructor.
5. Submission of current resume or completion of the Undergraduate Program's vita form.

## **Criteria For Selecting Satellite Agencies And Supervisors**



Once a satellite agency and field supervisor have been identified the following criteria will be followed:

1. In a limited number of instances, the primary field agency can place the student in a satellite agency with a professional employee with a degree in the human services and extensive social service experience.
2. The purpose of the satellite assignment is to augment the generalist practice opportunities of students placed in agencies that are typically too micro or macro oriented. In order to ensure that the student receives diverse practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, the agency field instructor can seek approval from the Coordinator of Field Instruction to provide the student with a satellite assignment.
3. The satellite setting and its designated supervisor must be approved by the Coordinator of Field Instruction.

4. The student can spend up to eight hours per week in this supplemental setting for the block semester or spend eight hours/weekly for a designated period of time working on a short-term project. The student must receive social work supervision from the MSW supervisor at the primary placement on a weekly basis.
5. Any satellite field assignments must be incorporated into the student's Field Instruction Plan.
6. The satellite agency staff assigned to work with the student is expected to follow standards 3, 4, 6-8, and 10-12 (Criteria for Selecting Agency Field Instructors) and use the agency field instructor and the Coordinator of Field Instruction as consultants.
7. Satellite supervisors must submit a current resume or completion of the Undergraduate Program's vita form.

## **Orientation And Seminars For Agency Field Instructor**



During the orientation for agency field instructors, the Coordinator of Field Instruction provides a broad overview of Alabama A&M University's purpose, objectives and curriculum for the Undergraduate Social Work Program's Field Instruction. The orientation also covers a variety of issues, e.g. how agencies are selected, expectations for field instructors and students, learning experiences, student evaluations, conferences, agency field instructor seminars, student orientation, and other field related matters.

Four seminars are held each school year. The orientation seminar is held at the beginning of each block semester. The other two seminars are held throughout the year (one in the Fall and one in the Spring) and provide an opportunity for further discussion of learning experiences, input into the curriculum, and identification of gaps in generalist practice experiences. Presentations on specific social problems sometimes serve as the content for the seminars. The presentations serve as an educational experience for field instructors who receive contact hour credit.

## **Input From Agency Field Instructors**



Agency field instructors are encouraged to provide formal and informal input on an on-going basis. This is done individually and in-group settings. The instructors are afforded this opportunity when they participate in seminars, regular conferences, the Field Review & Certification Committee, student evaluations, and as visiting lectures.

1. Seminars for field instructors are held twice each semester. The seminars are structured for field instructors to stay abreast of current Social Work issues, policies and the A&M curriculum; as well as to meet A&M faculty, University administrators, and the Undergraduate Social Work student body. Additionally, the seminars are designed to share ideas regarding the education and training of students for professional social work practice; to provide input into the Field Instruction Program; to interact with representatives from various social agencies used by the Undergraduate Social Work Program at A&M; to ventilate problems and discuss changes which occur in the agencies used by the Social Work Program; and to review and discuss the Program's learning activities for students in Field Instruction.
2. Agency field instructors provide input to the Coordinator of Field Instruction through individual conferences. They are able to recommend improvements related to the overall Field Instruction Program, classroom preparations for field, identify deficiencies and gaps, and other related issues regarding the students' educational experience.
3. Some agency field instructors have been selected to participate on the Social Work Advisory Committee and the Field Review and Certification Committee. In this capacity, they examine the curriculum, course syllabi and make formal suggestions and recommendations for needed changes.
4. Student evaluation is an on-going process. The agency field instructor provides feedback to the Coordinator of Field Instruction regarding the educational needs of students. For example, if a student does not seem to understand social problems and their implications for Social Work, this deficiency is noted and the faculty informed. If students need improvement in their writing skills, the faculty is informed. As agency field instructors directly observe students in practice, they are able to identify strengths and weaknesses in

learning and share this information with the faculty as well as with the students.

5. Agency field instructors are invited to the Undergraduate Social Work Program as guest lecturers to share their expertise in a particular class. They offer fresh and innovative material that strengthens course content so as to adequately prepare entry level Social Work practitioners.

## **Regular Visits To Agencies**



Regular meetings are held between the Coordinator of Field Instruction and the agency field instructors. The field instructors are sometimes invited to the University for these conferences. The Coordinator of Field Instruction will visit agencies twice a semester. The scheduled meetings take place to ensure that the teaching component of the field practicum has a social work focus. Activities are evaluated and suggestions for additional learning activities are made. Problems and/or concerns are also discussed. Additionally, the faculty field liaison meets with agency field staff twice per semester.

## **Agency Orientation For Students**



A structured orientation would help the student to assess whether the field experience is in fact providing the skills and knowledge needed to function effectively as social work practitioners after graduation. The following guidelines are suggested for the beginning of the placement:

1. Protocol - parking facilities and rules, eating facilities; lunch and break time; locations of bathrooms; dress codes; and special agency insurance coverage; policy regarding reimbursement for travel and other expenses; scheduled agency holidays; requirements for signing in and out; rules on using the telephone (long distance calls); any special security precautions; other issues peculiar to the agency should be shared with the student during orientation.
2. Mission and purpose statement - description of what the agency/department of service delivery system does and does not do. Provide a brief history (brochures, pamphlets), funding sources, and methods of program development, the types of clientele served and

their needs should be included in an orientation packet.

3. Organizational chart - clearly lists the position of social workers in the agency. Provide an organizational chart for the unit or department and show the agency's position as a part of a larger, complex, bureaucracy, or institution.
4. Introduce to clerical and receptionist staff - so that they know the student by face and name and can refer calls. It might be helpful to have the home address and telephone number on file in case of emergency.
5. Explain the filing system - explain the procedure for getting a letter typed, something copied or a tape sent to the steno-pool for transcription. Explain how mail and messages are handled. It may be necessary to remind the student that the agency clerical staff cannot type homework assignments, resumes, or other personal materials and that the agency copy machine cannot be used for copying personal material.
6. Explain the agency's procedure for compiling reports - recording client contacts, etc. Provide copies of outlines for intake, transfer, social history summaries and other required reports. Show examples of recording in actual records. Give instructions on use of the Dictaphone equipment.
7. State clearly how the student is to identify him/herself - in (1) written recording in agency records; (2) written reports and correspondence that go outside the agency; (3) oral contacts with clients, families, and others.
8. Introduce the student - to key supervisory or administrative personnel.
9. Orient the student to the agency library - if any or other resources.
10. Discuss specific confidentiality requirements of the agency - present specific guidelines for preserving confidentiality of material taken from the field into the classroom. Ask the student what he or she has had in the classroom regarding confidentiality.

11. Reference materials - each student should have access to the following reference materials:
  1. Phone directories (intra-agency & community)
  2. Agency manual
  3. Community resources
  4. Dictionary
  5. Reference materials that staff use daily.
12. Interviewing area - student can find a private interviewing area when needed.
13. Reading - Advise students that it is permissible to read during field placement time. The reading should be related to the presenting problems of their specific assignments. Advise students not to use their placement to complete classroom reading. Remember that a fully challenging placement experience usually leaves little time for unrelated activities.
14. Provide the student with an annotated bibliography - of suggested readings to orient the student to the service delivery system, or the specialize field of practice. List materials that can be located readily.
15. Provide the student with terms particular to agency - symbols, agency jargon, a glossary of abbreviations.
16. Examine the student's classroom curriculum - look at courses taken prior to beginning the placement so as to identify knowledge gaps that could hinder functioning in field placement.

## **Types Of Agency Experiences**



There are certain types of experiences that the social work program believes should be experienced by every student. We identify these below and urge that each field instructor appropriately develop them in his/her own setting.

1. Orientation to the Agency or Program Where the Student is Placed  
As strangers to the agencies of placement, students will need some orientation to the agency. A well structured first day including a personal interview with the Coordinator or program supervisor, guided tour of the larger

agency, and review of the agency manual will facilitate a more rapid integration into the agency. Other helpful activities might include observation of the waiting room, reading agency cases, and review of the agency administrative structure.

2. Development of Professional Self

Students need to know their role in the agency. They need to recognize their role and understand its relationship to others of the agency. This is the first step toward the development of a professional self.

The development of a professional relationship with the supervisor. The student needs to understand this relationship and the purpose and place of supervision in the learning process. What aspects need to be understood?

The concept of confidentiality was learned intellectually in the classroom. In addition, self-awareness and the conscious use of self, as significant parts of the developing professional, are to be stressed throughout the learning process.

3. Experience in Interviewing

Every student would have taken SWK 309 (Social Work Methods I) and will, therefore, have had some theoretical study of interviewing. Some field instructors prefer to have students begin by observing interviews conducted by experienced interviewers and others prefer to review the basic principles with students and help them carefully plan their interviews; some do both. It needs to be remembered that field instruction is an educational program and not an apprenticeship, therefore specific instruction in this area is essential. Furthermore, it has been found that too long a period of observation heightens anxiety. Students have had some experience in observation in earlier courses, and need practice experience.

4. Experience in Relating to Individuals

The development of the professional relationship is fundamental to generic social work practice. Experiences should be planned

to enhance this ability in the student. The student should be helped to see what such a relationship entails and be given clients with whom they will be able to form a professional relationship over a period of time.

5. Experience with Groups

It is essential that students gain awareness of group dynamics and the skill in relating to how groups are developed. As a significant primary group of our society it is essential that the student learns how to work with the whole family. The staff is another group that the student needs to understand. The student also needs to be aware of other group practice in Social Work programs. Wherever possible the student should have some part in a significant role in group practice.

6. Experience in Community Activities

The student needs to be helped to understand the relationship of the agency or program to the total community. Students should be able to identify community social problems, and agencies and programs seeking to address these problems. Attendance at community meetings and participation in planning community change are desired wherever possible.

7. Experience in Obtaining Information, Analyzing Situations, and Working Toward Change

Students through previous Social Work courses have had some experience in reading cases, identifying the problems, and treatment planning. They have also studied community problems such as poverty and crime. Field instruction should allow the student to apply these generic social work concepts. Reading what others have done in your agency may be used for orientation, but they need to work in these types of situations. They need to experience data gathering, analyzing situations, and planning change. They also need to see that this applies to work with individuals, groups, organizations, and the community.

8. Organizational Behavior

Students should have experience in a complex

organization in order to observe the "red tape" and formal expressions. They should have experience with working the confines of a bureaucratic structure and using the policies to the maximum for the clientele served.

#### 9. Summaries and Recording

Every student should have experience in recording social work data and in summarizing material, whether a case summary, a summary of group dynamics and development, or community developments. Letter and memo writing are other important skills in which beginning ability should be demonstrated.

## Case Assignments



### Case Assignments Guidelines

- Do not postpone case assignment until all other learning (procedures, etc.) has been achieved. This is not possible.
- Avoid cases with poorly written records, particularly when student is new.
- Caseload sizes are not important; it depends entirely upon the agency, the objectives of the placement, etc. However, overloading a student is never acceptable.
- Remember it is impossible to adequately pre-screen all cases.
- Warn students in the beginning that if a case turns out other than as expected or in need of a highly experienced worker, it may have to be transferred.
- Do not assign only easy cases, or only boring routine cases, or only cases that regular staff want to get rid of.
- Try to give variety in types of cases and variety in contacts (family, client, court, agencies, other, etc.).
- In very complicated cases, let students shadow you or other experienced workers.
- It is sometimes appropriate to assign a student to assist another worker, but never for an entire internship. Students should carry a caseload; after all, they are frequently only a

few months away from being a full time employee with a full caseload or entering a graduate program as an advanced standing student.

- Be creative if you feel it will provide a good learning experience; assign two students to one case, or use any other format appropriate to your setting.

### **Early Case Assignments:**

- Assign student to read all existing data on case.
- If applicable, assign the student some reading on the appropriate primary diagnosis or presenting problem.
- Ask student to think about the possible needs of such a client and prepare a list for discussion in supervisory conference.
- Ask student to write out the known case goals and the purpose of his/her first contract.
- Role-play the first contact.
- Process record the first contact. (To be done within 48 hours after the contact; supervisor should review it and return it to student before the next conference). Discuss the recording and the content of the next contact.
- Ask student to keep log of feelings and impressions in early activities.

### **Guidelines For Mid-Term And Final Evaluation**



- Review with student in a private conference environment.
- Should not be done at end of the day, when both are tired and may tend to take short cuts.
- Agency instructor may prepare evaluation and discuss with student or ask student to prepare his/ her own evaluation for discussion--or a combination of the above.
- Be open to changes, but do not make changes as the result of pressure from student; make them only if you genuinely agree.

- If there is strong disagreement from the student, he/she can attach a written statement signed by both parties.
- When more than one supervisor or field instructor is part of the student's supervision, all should participate in preparing the final evaluation.
- When there are problems either student or agency field instructor can request information or a meeting with Program faculty.
- Do not inflate the rating to avoid student anger. When preparing narrative, be honest and specific. Sometimes it helps to ask yourself the following question: Would I hire this student? Would I want to supervise him or her as an employee? Would I want him or her as my worker if I were a client?
- Be prepared for a variety of student reactions. Some examples are:
  - relief
  - silence
  - positive, pleased
  - sense of bonding with agency field instructor
  - gratitude
  - ingratiating behaviors
  - sad, disappointed
  - anger
  - disbelief
  - disagreement
  - tears