Social Work Field Education

Purpose
The purpose of the field practicum is to provide students the opportunity to work in a professional setting to develop and demonstrate skills in social work, to integrate the theories and practices learned in and out of the classroom, to develop a sense of commitment to the social work profession and Code of Ethics, to develop an understanding of the diversity of a community population and the role of diversity in social work practice, to develop an understanding of how administrative processes and policies impact delivery of services, to develop professional relationships within the community to better understand local resources to benefit future clients, and to confirm personal interests and abilities in the social service field.

As students undertake learning within the reality of agency life, a vehicle is established whereby use of theory and conceptual frameworks acquired through course work is applied, skills are developed and refined, and attitudes and values are examined. Additionally students are afforded opportunities for analysis of the effects of social welfare policy on programs and services, opportunities for the development of research questions in relation to practice efforts, and opportunities for evaluation of practice interventions. Field practicum courses enable students to personally affirm the validity of content presented in the classroom. The progressive, reciprocal relationship between theory and conceptual frameworks and practice becomes a dynamic in the teaching-learning process of field instruction. Field Instruction enables students to integrate the knowing, feeling and doing aspects of their social work education. It is designed to produce a knowledgeable, skilled, self-evaluating and professionally reflective social worker.

Objectives
Knowledge:
1. Basic understanding of how generalist social work practice is applied in a specific agency setting.
2. Knowledge about the application of theories to client situations in the agency setting.
3. Knowledge regarding the use of culturally sensitive practice methods with diverse and at-risk populations.
4. Knowledge about the social work system and structure in an agency, and how the structure impacts the provision of social work services.
5. Awareness of practice issues, policy issues, and related research information relating to the student’s field setting as well as to the placement settings of other students.
6. Awareness of appropriate methods for social action related to the agency purpose and function and participation in these when appropriate.
7. Awareness of social service resources in the area to enable students to broker services to enhance client functioning and well-being.

Skills:
1. Enhancement of interviewing skills to enable the student to develop working relationships with diverse types of clients and client groups, to formulate initial and ongoing assessments at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, and to modify relationship styles to fit the client situation.
2. Ability to prepare an appropriate intervention/service plan for actual clients based on person-in-environment and strengths assessment and the availability of agency services.
3. Increased self-awareness of the student’s own intrapersonal and interpersonal attributes that enhance or interfere with therapeutic relationships or the social work role.
4. Application of practice and program evaluation skills for purposes of accountability, outcome monitoring, improvement of practice, and program development.
5. Development of the ability to use supervision in an appropriate manner for continued growth and development.
6. Development of the ability to work collaboratively with a variety of helping professionals.
7. Development of appropriate documentation skills within the agency setting which are clear, organized, and meet professional standards for the profession and the particular agency setting.

Values:
1. Respect for an individual's worth and dignity and their unique characteristics.
2. Importance of advocating for the client with organizations and systems to ensure protection of rights and procurement of needed resources.
3. Appreciation for professional ethics, especially confidentiality, regarding clients, peers, agencies, and recognition of the individual’s right to self-determination and active participation in the helping process.

Structure for Field Practicum
There are two semesters of field practicum for all social work majors. Students typically enter field their senior year. Students complete both semesters of field concurrently in the same agency unless there are extenuating circumstances which necessitate a change.

SWK 488: Internship Practicum I and SWK 489: Internship Practicum II each require 225 documented hours, for a total of 450 hours of agency work over the course of two semesters. Even if a student completes 250 hours prior to the end of either semester, that student is required to complete 15 weeks of field placement during both the fall and spring semesters. Students may accumulate internship hours between the fall and spring semesters. This arrangement must be made with the field instructor and approved by the NCU Field Coordinator. If this situation should occur, students may count accumulated hours toward the spring semester, but will still be responsible for completing the 15 week internship at a reduced number of hours per week. Students are not required to work during fall or spring holiday breaks or final exam weeks; however, they may choose to schedule hours with the agency during these periods.
SWK 488: Internship Practicum I and SWK 489: Internship Practicum II, meet weekly throughout the entire period of the field placement. In addition, there are other required social work courses students take each semester (Fall: Psych 460 – Research Methods and Spring: Psyc 495 – Senior Project).

The NCU Field Education Coordinator, in conjunction with the student, and the agency field instructor, will make decisions regarding students’ changing agency placements at any point.

**Field Practicum Seminar**
During a student’s field placement, he/she participates in a weekly Field Instruction Seminar. The seminar serves a very useful function by combining students from a variety of field of practice settings. This enables the student to have a broader perspective in terms of practice settings, client populations, and treatment methodologies than they might not otherwise experience.

Each seminar class is organized around a theme, such as racism within society, the value of practice evaluation and evaluation techniques which can be easily implemented and enrich practice, sexism within the profession, and goal setting and contracting with clients. The student may be assigned readings related to each topic. Discussion is geared toward enhancing students’ experiences in their internship, assisting them in making linkages between the knowledge they have obtained in the classroom and their experiences in the field, and facilitating their ongoing professional development.

A weekly component of each field seminar is a group discussion of the student’s experiences during the week. The discussions enable the student to share the high points and low points of their week, successes and frustrations. The students serve as a support system and provide constructive feedback to each other. This aspect is considered by the students to be an especially valuable component of the class.

In addition to the discussions, there are written components to field instruction seminars. For instance, students are required to submit weekly logs in which they describe and analyze the activities of the week in their field placements. Confidentiality of clients is protected as identifying information is omitted. Each student is required to do a comprehensive analysis of the policies that operate in the agency. All assignments and the grading scale are identified in the course outline.

**Individualized Learning Plan**
In addition to the goals and learning objectives of the Internship Practicum, it is very important that each student be aware of and verbalize individual goals for field instruction which are pertinent to personal learning needs and the particular field agency. Near the beginning of each semester of placement, the student develops an individualized learning contract that includes learning goals, objectives, activities/tasks, and evaluation measures that address areas of professional knowledge and skills in need of development or improvement. Agency field instructors and the NCU Field Education Coordinator are available to assist students with this process.
Students complete three copies of the Individual Learning Plan. One copy is submitted to the agency field instructor and one to the faculty liaison. The third copy is to be retained by the student. The learning goals can be modified or others added at any time during the placement, and progress toward goals is evaluated at regular intervals.

**Recommended Field Learning Experiences**

Each field agency offers a unique opportunity for students to experience social work in all its many facets. Populations served will vary as will the make-up of the staff and the types of services provided. Within this broad range of field learning experiences, it is highly recommended that certain types of experiences be made available to students in field instruction settings.

The following is a list of recommended field learning experiences:

- **Orientation to the agency** — includes staff, facility, office procedures, filing system, types of services provided, agency’s place in the social service network, methods of intervention, etc.

- **Experiences in developing and managing effective interventive relationships** — includes opportunities for students to observe a number of staff with their own individual styles of intervention, participation in a variety of helping relationships, and the use of supervision to assist students to determine how they can develop an effective working relationship with a variety of client systems.

- **Recording experience** — includes case summaries, letters to clients and other agencies, process recordings of interviews, and eventually direct entry of students’ recordings into the agency’s records, etc.

- **Administrative experiences** — includes observation/participation in staff meetings, funding hearings, public relations functions, budget planning, grant writing or reading grants already funded, lobbying efforts, board meetings, contracting requirements, etc.

- **Experience in resource/referral management** — includes overall orientation to services available to client population being served by the field agency; telephone contacts with other agencies providing support services to clients; scheduled visits to key agencies with whom linkage for clients is most common; and learning procedures for effective referrals.

- **Interviewing experiences** — includes observing, planning, and conducting interviews for a variety of purposes (intake, with staff, for volunteer programs, assessment, intervention, etc.), with diversified client systems in a variety of places (agency, home, school, hospital, etc.) The use of process recordings, observation, and tape-recorded sessions provides the field instructor with data to aid students in further developing interviewing skills.
• Experience with procedures for evaluation of individual practice and agency programs — includes designing a plan for evaluating own practice, client progress, and effectiveness of interventions; data collection and analysis; becoming familiar with procedures for agency program evaluation; and conceptualizing/developing a system for program evaluation if none exists, such as evaluation of service by clients.

• Experience with groups — includes observation and participation in groups such as client groups, staff meetings, client staffings, and groups available in the broader community for the purpose of developing an understanding of group processes and skill in interacting in groups as a member or facilitator.

• Experience in community activities — includes observation and/or participation in assignments that facilitate understanding of the community and its social service network, the field agency’s role in the community, as well as assignments that draw attention to unmet community needs and provide opportunity for community planning.

All learning experiences have, as a long range goal, the opportunity for students to develop increased skills, a greater level of independent functioning, and the development of a sense of professional identity with its accompanying values and guidelines under which the profession operates. Enabling the student to learn to utilize the supervisory relationship is central to the student’s growth in this area as well as all the other areas recommended for field learning experiences.

These suggestions can provide the student with sufficient opportunities to experience all facets of the agency as well as to create a structured learning experience. Other experiences of particular interest to a student can be incorporated into the student’s individual learning goals and contract at any time during the placement.
Placement Procedures

Choosing a Placement Site
In the spring semester of their junior year, social work majors will meet individually and collectively with the NCU Field Work Coordinator. During this meeting students will receive information regarding how to choose a placement site along with a current list of potential internship sites. Additionally, discussion will include the student’s interests, prior experience, career goals, and scheduling. Students are encouraged to think early about their interests and begin sending out resumes/setting up interviews soon after their advisement since there is often competition for field sites from their fellow students, other programs at NCU and other universities who have both undergraduate and graduate students looking for field sites.

No student may make contact with a practicum site not on the list without the written approval of the NCU Field Work Coordinator which indicates that the site is acceptable as a potential field work site.

To prevent dual relationships, students may not choose an internship site in an agency in which a family member or close friend will be in a supervisory position over them or in which a family member or a close friend is a client receiving services.

Selection of Field Instructors
Agency-based field instructors for SW students have the primary responsibility for supervising students in their agency sites, including developing learning assignments, providing regular supervision, and evaluating mastery of field learning goals. Qualified field instructors must meet the following criteria:

- The field instructor's professional philosophy, goals and objectives must be consistent with those of the social work profession.
- Field instructors must have demonstrated competency in their area(s) of practice, as indicated by holding a masters degree from an accredited school of social work; a graduate degree from an accredited program in an allied discipline that teaches counseling; or a BSW from an accredited undergraduate program and two years of supervised experience. Potential field instructors with other qualifications should consult the NCU Field Education Coordinator.
- If the field instructor does not have a social work degree, the field education program seeks to provide expanded professional supervision of students in the following ways:
  - Designation of a social work mentor within the agency setting if such a person is available. The mentor should be an employee of the agency with a social work degree who is willing to meet regularly with the student to expand and further their social work perspective and experience. A less preferred option would be a person with a social work degree employed by another agency.
  - In the absence of a social work mentor, the student would have additional contact with the NCU Field Work Coordinator on a regular basis in order to expand on the students’ integration of the social work perspective. This contact would occur at least every two weeks and more often if needed.
The field instructor must demonstrate commitment to his/her own professional development. Such commitment may be indicated by professional affiliations, participation in continuing education courses, workshops, and seminars in order to enhance and update practice skills, community involvement and leadership, innovation in service delivery, etc.

Field instructors must accept the validity of undergraduate education in social work as the entry-level educational requirement for professional practice.

The field instructor must be willing and able to devote sufficient time to:
- Participate in the student's educational program by reviewing curriculum materials.
- Plan student learning experiences consistent with the objectives of the social work program.
- Provide the student with appropriate, regularly scheduled supervision for all activities in which he/she is involved.
- Confer at stated intervals with the appropriate faculty.

Arranging a Placement
It is the student’s responsibility to contact agencies to request placement. The NCU Field Work Coordinator will provide direction/guidelines for preparing and sending resumes to potential sites. Students are encouraged to interview with at least two agencies. Students are advised to treat the process like an employment interview.

Confirming a Placement
When a placement is confirmed with a practicum site/student, the student will provide the NCU Field Work Coordinator with the name and address and contact information for the site. A Field Placement Agreement form will then be sent out for appropriate signatures. Students are also advised to send the field work supervisor a thank you note confirming arrangements for the practicum.

The student should also talk with the field site supervisor to determine if specific preparation is required prior to beginning the field work placement. This may include readings, having certain medical clearances, or being cleared by required background checks/finger printing. Several of these processes require several weeks to complete and may need to be done prior to beginning the field work experience so that the student is able to begin field work on time.

Prior to the beginning of the placement, the NCU Field Work Coordinator will send a packet of information to the practicum field supervisor, including the Internship Practicum Manual, Field Learning Plan, and Student Performance Evaluation Form.

Practicum Evaluation - agency
Students will be asked to evaluate their field practicum experience at the end of the semester. This information will be utilized as part of the NCU SW Program’s evaluation process of approved practicum sites as well as being available for use by prospective interns in selecting a practicum site.

Students are also asked to evaluate the teaching effectiveness and strategies of the field site supervisor. This information is compiled and shared with the field site supervisor after grades
for the field work practicum have been finalized and sent to the University registrar. This evaluative data is used by the field site supervisors to enhance their teaching of interns and by the NCU Field Work Coordinator to plan for future training topics for all field site supervisors.

**Practicum evaluation – student**

It is recommended that the field site supervisor and the student review the evaluation tool used in the practicum as one of the first tasks of their supervisory sessions. This will help focus the teaching and learning of both parties. The field practicum is graded on an A – F scale. This grade will be determined by the NCU Field Work Coordinator with input from the field site supervisor.

The NCU Field Work Coordinator will meet with the student and the field site supervisor at least twice during the semester and more frequently, if needed. The regularly scheduled meetings will occur around mid-semester and again at the end of the semester. The student evaluation form should be completed prior to the evaluation meeting.

Student’s final grades will be determined by the overall evaluation from the agency and progress made on their learning plans that are developed early in the semester. (Learning plans can and should be modified throughout the semester with mutual consent from the student, faculty, and NCU Field Work Coordinator.)

If, at the midterm evaluation meeting, the field supervisor and Field Work Coordinator agree that the student is not displaying appropriate social work skill and therefore at risk of failing the Practicum, the student (with input from the field supervisor and Field Work Coordinator) must write a corrective action plan to address deficient areas. This plan must be signed by the student, field supervisor, and the NCU Field Work Coordinator.

**Responsibilities of the NCU Field Work Coordinator Include:**

- Assist students with selecting appropriate field work sites
- Conducting the weekly practicum seminar
- Meeting with the student and field site supervisor at least twice during the semester and more frequently if requested/needed by the student or the field work supervisor
- Assisting the student and field site supervisor in the evaluation process and assigning the final grades
- Providing resources for the student and field instructor that will enhance the learning process

**Responsibilities of the Student Include:**

- Sending out resumes and arranging for an interview with one or more potential field placements
- Arranging a schedule with the site supervisor
- Keeping track of hours worked on a Practicum Timesheet
- Assuming the responsibility for completing all assignments including the writing of the Learning Plan
• Acting in a professional manner at the agency. This includes following the NASW Code of Ethics, notifying the field supervisor of any absences in a timely manner, and keeping appointments with clients and agency staff meetings with the field site supervisor. It also includes following all agency rules and regulations and federal and state laws

• Participating in the evaluation of her/his learning
• Communicating with the field site instructor about his/her learning needs
• Communicating with faculty about learning needs or problems in the field placement
• Completing forms to evaluate the field practicum and the field site supervisor’s teaching at the end of the placement.

Responsibilities of the Field Site Supervisor Include:

• Interviewing students and determining their appropriateness for the field site
• Being familiar with the objectives and procedures of the NCU Social Work Program field work program and with the Practicum Manual
• Informing necessary staff in the agency of the student’s learning plan
• Orienting the student to the agency
• Assisting with the formation of the student’s learning plan
• Scheduling and holding regular supervisory sessions with the student (minimally 1 hour a week)
• Informing the student of any known or suspected dangers in the agency practice setting and assisting the student to prepare a personal safety plan if needed
• Providing regular feedback to the student
• Contacting the NCU Field Work Coordinator if the need for additional visits to the site are needed or if there are any problems needing attention
• Attending the presentation of Senior Projects by the SW students at the end of the spring semester, if possible
• Providing the NCU Field Work Coordinator with current information regarding background and credentials as a social worker

Policy for Students Completing a Practicum in an Agency in Which They are Also Employed

Students who wish to complete their practicum placement in an agency in which they are employed must work closely with the NCU Field Work Coordinator to ensure that the agency meets the standards for an approved agency and that the student can receive a quality relevant learning experience with appropriate supervision. The agency must agree to adequate release time for the student to attend the seminar portion of the class (once a week to be determined). Agencies must understand that student assignments and field work supervision should differ from those associated with the student’s employment and must be responsibilities that would be given to a bachelor degree educated staff member. Agencies must take care that the field duties are educationally focused and that there is not diminution of the program’s established requirements in seminar and field practicum
**Policy for Students Using Their Own Vehicles to Conduct Business of the Field Agency**

The SW program does not require or encourage the use of personal vehicles by students to conduct agency business such as transporting clients. If a student chooses to do so, he/she must carry personal automobile insurance that includes the use of the vehicle for business purpose.

**Malpractice and Liability Coverage**

NCU assumes the coverage for student malpractice insurance which is not included on the agency’s blanket policy. Other liability should be included in the agency policies and students may wish to obtain malpractice insurance on their own, as well.

**Mission of the NCU SW Program**

The Social Work Program at North Central University will train students in the knowledge and skills of social work practice. The program is guided by a love for Christ and a commitment to service to God and to humanity. Our educational framework is based on the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) requirements, Christian values, the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics, the National Association of Christian Social Workers (NACSW) statement of faith and practice, a liberal arts foundation, as well as a biblical foundation. We value a holistic approach to social work that includes the mind (knowledge), the body (practice), and the spirit (faith).

**Social Work Program Mission Statement**

The social work program’s mission is to prepare students in the knowledge, application, and integration of generalist social work values and practice in the context of a Christian worldview that emphasizes social justice, human dignity, and service.

**Social Work Program Goals and Competencies:**

**Knowledge**

**Goal 1: Provide students with a sound base of knowledge that informs generalist social work practice.**

Core Competencies:

- Students will demonstrate competency in the following areas of knowledge:
  1) the history, philosophy, value, ethics and scope of practice of social work
  2) the theories of human behavior in the context of person-in-in environment.
  3) the diverse nature of societies and culture and how that shapes the human experience
  4) the history and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination
  5) the complexities of populations at risk and underserved populations
  6) the history of social welfare
  7) contemporary issues related to social work
  8) the importance of social policy in ensuring social and economic well-being
  9) the theories and techniques related to generalist social work practice.
  10) research methods
Skills
Goal 2: Foster the development of skills useful for academic and professional success.
Core Competencies:
Students will demonstrate competency in:
1) Critical thinking.
2) Communication in a variety of formats.
3) Using computers and other relevant technology.
4) Self-reflection and identifying personal biases.
5) Using strategies of ethical reasoning.

Application
Goal 3: Develop students who are socially minded and who can engage in generalist social work practice with diverse systems of all sizes.
Core Competencies:
Students will demonstrate competency in:
1) Applying social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.
2) Applying critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.
3) Engaging diversity and difference in practice.
4) Advancing human rights and social and economic justice.
5) Engaging in research informed practice and practice informed research.
6) Applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.
7) Engaging in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.
8) Responding to contexts that shape practice.
9) Engaging, assessing, intervening, and evaluating with systems of all sizes.

Integration
Goal 4: Develop students who adhere to the mission and values of the social work profession.
Core Competency:
To identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.
Goal 5: Develop students who integrate faith and practice while remaining sensitive to diversity.
Core Competencies:
Students will demonstrate competency in:
1) Applying the use of biblical values and ethics in generalist social work practice while remaining sensitive to the diverse nature of humanity.
2) Articulating a Christian world-view and critiquing issues in social work from a theologically-informed perspective.
3) Recognizing how the Christian worldview impacts social work practice
Field Learning Plan – Guidelines and Example

During a field placement students will have many opportunities to assess their learning needs, set their own learning goals, and evaluate their progress. Completing the Individual Learning Goals template is an exercise to facilitate this process. The intention of this exercise is to set up “learning and doing” objectives that are specific to the field placement setting. These goals pertain to the student’s own uniqueness and changes that a student wants to make, and behaviors that would help in the role of a professional social worker.

Before determining goals for one’s own learning, it is important to spend some time thinking about one’s needs in the areas of social work knowledge, values, and skills. What kinds of knowledge does a student need to learn or expand in order to function effectively in a particular agency? For example, a student may be in a setting which focuses on substance abuse problems and may have very limited knowledge of substance abuse issues. An obvious need for learning would be to acquire such knowledge. Determining more specifically the topics a student needs to cover and the best resources needed to assist in this learning will enable the student to achieve this goal.

The area of professional values/attitudes is a more difficult area to assess. If a student is aware of particular types of clients who she/he has negative attitudes toward, this is an obvious place to begin. Also, if there are types of problems or situations that cause a student considerable discomfort or anxiety, identifying or working these issues is important. Often learning in this area requires further mastery of operationalizing professional social work values in day-to-day work with clients. Students need to develop more awareness of one’s own personality and attitudes impact on professional practice. For example, a student may tend to be somewhat controlling in relationships with others and consequently may compromise client self-determination. Conversely, a student may have difficulty being assertive or dealing with conflict.

The student’s knowledge of his/her needs in the area of professional skills should expand through the field experience. Identifying specific needs such as using empathy, asking open-ended questions, talking too fast, or being able to end conversations gracefully can be useful. Professional writing skills may be an area for needed work and the more specifically the student can identify weaknesses, the more readily he/she can address these in goals and planned learning tasks.

As a student moves in to a field placement, it is helpful to reflect back on experiences in practice classes or volunteer work to assess a wide variety of skill areas. Reviewing the Evaluation Form for Student Field Practicum can also assist in developing goals, objectives and activities/tasks for each semester.

On the Individual Learning Goals template list your goals (global statements in relation to desired outcomes; what you hope to achieve rather than the process of getting there) and ways to accomplish them. Also determine methods for evaluating progress toward each goal.
The measurement on progress toward goals is sometimes the most difficult aspect of goal setting. Some possible mechanisms for evaluating goal attainment include:

- For discrete activities, simple completion of the task by a certain date may be determined.
- You may ask for feedback from certain individuals (field instructors, group co-leaders, peers, etc.) related to your specific goals if they observe you or have other basis for evaluating your progress.
- You may report on progress in weekly supervisory sessions.
- You may rate “feeling” goals on a scale of 1 – 10 at designated times and keep track of performance. For example, if you are working on your anxiety level in relation to a certain activity, you can rate your anxiety from 1 (none) to 10 (highest level); keep track of these ratings over time; and evaluate the extent of change.
- You may document your performance, tape interviews, or by other means of tracking your performance on certain skills to evaluate progress.

Example

Goals, objectives, tasks, and timelines:

Goal 1
To familiarize myself with my field placement and the services provided to clients.

Objective:
To be able to apply what I have learned about the agency when initially interacting with clients.

Activities/Tasks:
1. I will consult with the Coordinator of Intake Services and identify times and dates that fit with my schedule. I will complete this task no later than September 30, 20xx.
2. I will read the agency’s policy and procedure manuals by September 15, 20xx. I will complete the core competencies check list (practice test) and score at least 90%.
3. I will meet with my field instructor at least once to review the major components of the intake assessment and discuss my scoring on the practice tests. I will meet with my field instructor by October 15, 20xx.
Example of Individual Learning Plan Template:

## TEMPLATE FOR INDIVIDUAL LEARNING GOALS

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<tr>
<th>Goal 1: (Global statement in relation to desired outcome)</th>
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