

California Association of Social Work Deans and Directors

Principles for Ethical Field Placement of Social Work Students

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Introduction and Overview

Field education in social work, as outlined in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) 2015 (CSWE, 2015), represents the signature pedagogy for the training of social work professionals. Shulman (2005) notes signature pedagogies not only link the knowledge of the classroom with the skills of practice, but also serve to pass on the values of a profession, as students are socialized into professional roles and responsibilities. While several studies have examined characteristics determining successful field experiences, nothing exists in the literature as to the impact of the placement process itself on either the student experience, the training and socialization of future social workers in general, or the agency. This statement by the California Association of Deans and Directors seeks to outline principles for this process of selecting and placing social work students in internship sites. These principles are advanced with the following shared understandings and underlying values:

1. Socialization of new social work professionals begins in the placement process, as well as in the placement itself.
2. As accredited programs operating on a peer evaluation model, we are responsible to provide oversight of ourselves and our processes to ensure quality within professional training.
3. The educational program holds the responsibility for finding, approving, and monitoring the field placement.
4. The supervisory relationship between student and field instructor remains critical in the development and socialization of future social work professionals.
5. Opportunity to practice skills directly under observation, with feedback from a master instructor/practitioner, along with peer interaction and dialogue provide optimum learning.
6. Equity and access to quality field placements for all students upholds social work values and beliefs.
7. A volunteer model of agency and field instructor training and on-site supervision provides socialization of a shared professional responsibility and a value for training future competent social workers as part of professional identity.

For many years, field education has followed a fairly consistent model involving field education faculty taking the lead in nurturing and developing relationships and forging agreements with local agency partners, matching of students to field sites, volunteerism of agency and agency staff to train students, and development of consortiums in areas with multiple schools and overlapping agency partners.

Recent changes in environmental contexts including implementation of nationally accessible online programs, crisis in agency capacity to voluntarily train students, limited number of qualified supervisors, and increased program enrollments, have led some programs to initiate alternative models for placing students in field education. Some of these alternatives have included students being asked to find and develop their own placements, providing compensation to agencies or agency staff for field instruction and acceptance of students, use of off-site supervisors, and placing students in areas with established consortiums without regard to consortium guidelines developed in order to support a fair and cooperative process for the benefit of involved programs, agencies, and students.

As implementation of these newer models vary, with some programs providing excellent oversight and support of agencies and students, and some programs very little, *this document seeks to set out principles for the placement of students that support processes of professional cooperation and communication between schools, respect equitable access for students, and build capacity of agencies.* These guidelines seek to provide a framework for both traditional and emerging models of field education.

Placement Principles:

- 1) Educational programs, not individual students, are responsible to find, evaluate, oversee and monitor agency placements. In situations where students suggest potential placement sites, the program is responsible to follow up and negotiate a relationship and agreement with the site.
- 2) Programs develop formal MOUs or legal affiliation agreements, outlining roles and responsibilities for the protection of the student, agency, and program.
- 3) Programs ensure students have adequate liability insurance, including out of state coverage if applicable.
- 4) Internships have an identified field instructor who holds a social work degree from a CSWE accredited institution, available for regular supervision and for consultation in emergencies.
 - a. If an onsite social worker is not available, the site must provide an onsite preceptor from a very closely related field, or with direct expertise in the area of practice in a very closely related field, or with direct expertise in the area of practice, available for direct training, weekly supervision, and emergencies. Supplemental weekly supervision with a social worker who possesses CSWE required credentials is provided by the program or agency, with an established MOU between agency and supervisor.
 - b. When supplemental supervision is provided, regular communication between the on-site and off-site supervisor occurs.
- 5) On and offsite supervisors are trained by the program in program-expected competencies, and linking of program-stated competencies with field assignments.
- 6) Programs provide readily accessible faculty field liaisons to support both on and off site supervisors and support the educational development of students. .
- 7) Programs placing students outside of their geographic regions coordinate with existing programs or consortiums through ongoing communication including:

- a. Providing local Director(s) of Field Education names of sites with whom the university intends to develop affiliation agreements along with number of students to be placed.
 - b. Respecting and complementing existing area procedures for the placement of students.
- 8) Academic programs support capacity building of placement sites through training, resource development, research support, supervision or other services/programs that build agency capacity, but do not pay individual on site field instructors or the agency itself in exchange for exclusive placement rights inhibiting the capacity of other programs.
 - 9) Universities placing outside of their local area make continuous efforts to support capacity in those various geographic regions, e.g. development of new internships in the region accessible to all potential students or support of field supervisor trainings held within consortium.
 - 10) Agencies make student placement decisions based on student qualifications and fit with agency, independent of financial influence.
 - 11) Because of the unique issues involved in field education, universities provide adequate resources dedicated to field education.

References

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