Performance in Field

Social work internships are intensive learning experiences that provide both great learning opportunities and challenges. ECU School of Social Work places over 200 students in internships each year, and each internship involves multiple persons and systems. It is understood that at times issues may arise in a field placement even when all placement procedures are followed and all participants understand their roles. However it is expected that placement related problems will be addressed proactively, professionally, and in a timely fashion.

Most problems, whether personal, academic, or administrative, can be resolved in a professional manner between the parties involved if identified and acted upon early. As soon as a potential problem arises, field instructors, task supervisors, and students should discuss the issues and together attempt to resolve them. The student must take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning and utilize the problem-solving model to work on resolving problems in the field placement. If informal problem solving efforts are unsuccessful, formal corrective action will be required.

Preventing problems in field

- Communicate openly and honestly. Provide regular constructive feedback.
- Don’t skip weekly supervision. Students are encouraged to prepare an agenda, and take initiative in getting the supervision they need.
- Plan ahead.
- Read the Field website and on line Field Manual.
- Students should read all communication from the Field Office, Field Instructors, Task supervisors, and the Seminar instructor to be sure they meet their responsibilities and deadlines. If something isn’t clear, ask for assistance to clarify.
- Put sufficient time and effort into the development of the Learning Agreement to ensure that it reflects the learning needs of the student and the agency opportunities. Be sure the student activities are specific and measurable.
Performance-Related Field Issues

Unprofessional performance may at times cause problems in the field placement. Students are expected to adhere to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Ethical behaviors are part of the requirements and standards for the social work field programs. Students are also expected to follow agency policies and procedures, and to otherwise conduct them in a professional manner at all times. Failure to meet these expectations will be reflected in the grade for field, and may result in other action being taken by the school.

Professional behavior for Social Workers includes appropriate relations with clients, colleagues, supervisors, and coworkers including both written and face to face interaction. Social workers should be able to identify and modify their presentation to others, utilizing self-awareness and constructive feedback from others.

The Council on Social Work Education also recognizes the need for specific professional behaviors in their Core Competencies. These include:

**Competency 2.1.1 Identify as professional social worker and conduction oneself accordingly.**
- Social workers practice personal reflection and self-correction to assure continual professional development
- Social workers attend to professional roles and boundaries
- Social workers demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication.

**Competency 2.1.2 Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.**
- Social workers recognize and manage personal values in a way that allows professional values to guide practice
- Social workers make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics
- Social workers apply strategies of ethical reasoning to arrive at principled decisions.

Performance related field issues may include:

- **Unprofessional behavior** – student is repeatedly late, absent from placement, or does not give agency prior notification of absences.
- **Attitude to Learning**—Students who are unable to utilize feedback, are persistently defensive or lack self-awareness.
- **Unable to develop helping relationships**—Each profession is dependent on its practitioners possessing appropriate character attributes. Social work particularly requires the ability to empathize, project warmth, and develop trusting relationships with a wide variety of people. The inability to enable others to form close, trusting relationships with the social worker and to manage the intense emotional expressions which come from people in need may hinder social work practice.
• **Emotional or Mental Health issues**—Emotional and mental health issues may at times affect students ability to perform consistently in the field, and has the potential to jeopardize client welfare. A pattern of such issues may indicate that it is not appropriate for the student to be in a field placement at that time.

• **Unprofessional Behavior/Violating Code of Ethics**—Unprofessional conduct or a breach of the NASW Code of Ethics may be deemed to be serious enough to terminate field work and the social work program. (See NASW Code of Ethics- Appendix A)

• **Failure to Disclose or False Reporting**—The failure to disclose pertinent data or giving false information in applying for field education is grounds for termination from field placement and from the social work degree program. Pertinent data may include information about significant personal history that can affect the student’s ability to work with vulnerable populations. Giving false information may include omitting history of a felony conviction. Such a conviction must be disclosed to field office faculty at the interview for field placement.

**Non Performance-Related Field Issues**

At times issues may arise in a field placement that are not related to student performance. These may include issues such as:

• **Inadequate agency resources to support field placement.**
• **Learning experiences in agency are too narrow.**
• **Misplacement error based on paper credentials of students and field placement.**
• **Agency reorganization.**

The Field Problem Solving process should also be followed in addressing non-performance field issues.
The Field Problem-Solving Process

The following step-by-step process should be followed when issues arise in the placement, regardless of the nature of the difficulty. This administrative procedure must be followed in order for students to be afforded due process. Students who do not adhere to their specific responsibilities or who do not follow the procedure below may be administratively removed from the program.

1. **The student should first talk to the Field Instructor and/or Task Supervisor(s) about any issues or problems in the placement.** Likewise, the Field Instructor and Task Supervisors should first address any problems or concerns directly with the student. Students and field supervisors may ask their Faculty Field Liaison (Seminar Instructor) for advice or guidance before discussing the issue with each other.

2. **If the problems still remain unsolved, the student or Field Instructor may request a meeting with the student, Field Instructor and Faculty Field Liaison (Seminar Instructor) to develop a plan of action.** The Seminar Instructor may consult with the Director of Field Instruction as needed.

3. **If the problem is not resolved satisfactorily, the Faculty Field Liaison (seminar instructor) consults with the Director of Field Education or appropriate Field Faculty.** They will gather information from all parties and determine the appropriate actions. This might include a meeting with the agency and/or student, remedial learning experiences, removal from the placement, or referring the student to the BSW or MSW Admissions and Retention Committee.

4. **When a student is referred to the Admission and Retention Committee,** the committee will meet with the student to thoroughly assess the information related to the problem. The committee will determine the appropriate resolution and make recommendations to assist with achieving the determined outcome.

5. A written statement by the Program Coordinator regarding the recommendations of the committee will be included in the student’s program record and field education file.

Field Placement Termination

The Termination Process

If attempts at problem solving do not result in resolution of issues or significant improvement, the School or the Agency may decide to terminate the placement. Students may request termination, but students may not terminate the placement themselves.

It is always preferable for the Problem Solving process to be followed, to ensure a thorough consideration of all perspectives and to guarantee due process for students and agencies. However, there may be times when this is not possible.

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The Termination Process – continued

By the Agency
The Agency has the right to terminate a student’s internship, or exclude the student from the agency if the agency determines that the student is not performing satisfactorily, is interfering with the Agency’s operations, or may affect client services or safely. The student should be made aware of the intent to terminate, and given the opportunity to respond prior to the release. In the event the Agency elects to terminate a student, it shall immediately notify the Faculty Field Liaison and review the situation to provide the student with due process and assist in developing future plans. If the request is due to some severe or drastic failure on the part of the student, then it will be necessary to proceed with formal administrative measures.

By the School
The School of Social Work reserves the right to remove a student from a field placement and/or the program if, in the opinion of the faculty, the student lacks the maturity, judgment, or professionalism to function in the field of social work. If it is recommended that a student withdraw from field, s/he cannot be readmitted during that semester. The student must repeat the full semester, including a field experience, in order to graduate.

Students may not terminate a placement on their own
Students should make every effort to follow the Field Problem Solving Process above, however if a student feels there are compelling circumstances, such as personal safety, they may contact the Field Director and request that their placement be terminated. Terminating a field placement is only done for compelling circumstances and in consultation with the agency and the school.

When termination occurs, the student must work with the Field Instructor and Faculty Field Liaison to follow a professional termination process with clients and the agency. Whenever possible, the original Field Instructor should submit a summary and evaluation of the student’s field experience to date. This summary is shared with the student and becomes part of the school record. The student may submit a response to the evaluation.

Securing a new Internship
If a field placement is terminated, and the School determines the student is eligible to re-enter Field, the Office of Field Education is responsible for selecting and arranging the new placement. An interview with the new Field Instructor and agency is required. Information about the previous placement and termination will be discussed. Students need to be aware that when an internship is terminated, a new placement may not be immediately available and there may be a delay in starting the new internship. All missed hours must be made up, or the student will receive an “Incomplete” for the course. It may also be necessary for the student to
complete additional field hours in the new placement to ensure that they achieve adequate learning.