Leniency Bias:
Strategies to Support Accuracy and Consistency in Field Performance Evaluations

Council on Social Work Education’s Annual Program Meeting
Tampa, Florida
October 26, 2014

Amy Barsanti, MSW, CMSW – UNC Charlotte
Rebecca Brigham, MSW – UNC Chapel Hill
Susan Marchetti, MSW, LCSW – UNC Charlotte
Nancy Pierson, MSW, LCSW – East Carolina University
Leniency Bias

- The tendency to evaluate individuals more favorably than warranted
  - Can impede constructive supervision and prevent accurate evaluation
Why?

- Field instructors play many roles with students
- Tension between teacher and gatekeeper
- Negative feedback can result in negative behaviors
- May lack experience in skill in supervision and evaluation
- May experience confusion on how the completion of tasks translates into competence
- Due to job stress, the field instructor may not have time to fully evaluate the student
Many programs are using field instructor evaluations as a measure for accreditation.

4.0.1 The program presents its plan to assess the attainment of each of its competencies. The plan specifies procedures, multiple measures of each practice behavior, and benchmarks employed to assess the attainment of each of the program’s competencies. EPAS, 2008
Assessment Data on Students

- “At least 90% of BSW students field instructors and students will rate themselves a 9 or higher on competencies

- At least 90% of MSW students field instructors and students will rate themselves a 9 or higher on competencies

- 100% noted to meet the benchmark with the exception of students in the following areas
  - Engage in Policy Practice 69%
  - Cultural Context – 73%

Efforts to Address

- Education of Field Instructors
- Orientation
- Follow up during site visits
Development of Rubrics

- Process and input by key stakeholders
- Foundation Year Rubrics
  - Benchmark with existing documents
  - Review drafts with field faculty
  - Review with field advisory board
  - Pilot in 2005–2016
CSWE EPAS recognizes that students learn from both Explicit and Implicit features of social work curriculum.

Explicit – “the program’s formal educational structure and includes the courses and the curriculum”
*CSWE Educational Policy 2.0*

Implicit – “the educational environment in which the curriculum is presented”  *CSWE Educational Policy 3.0*

Training for Field Instructors should address both explicit and implicit features of supervision.
Explicit Factors

Provide thorough training on program structure, procedures and evaluation instruments, in the context of the mission and goals of CSWE and your SW program.

- **Learning Goals**
  - CSWE Core Competencies
  - Practice Behaviors – foundation and advanced
  - Program Specific Learning Goals
  - Student Specific Learning Goals

- **Grading**
  - Explain grading scale and define criteria
  - Components – persons, percentages, processes
  - Instruments used – Learning Agreements, Status Reports
Explicit Factors

- Learning Agreement
  Explain connection to Learning Goals
  Define role in assessment of student performance
  Development of Learning Activities

- Field Education Supervision
  Importance of the Supervisory relationship
  SW Supervisory functions
    Educational, Administrative, Supportive

Exercise:
  Developing Learning Activities for different:
    agencies, students, learning goals
Implicit Factors

Provide training to familiarize Field Instructors with factors which may influence students performance and supervisor effectiveness, and offer strategies to manage them.

- **Possible Student issues**
  - Grading – student expectations
  - Feelings about internship – recognizing and addressing
  - Understanding of SW model of supervision
  - Personal issues

- **Field Instructor considerations**
  - Supervisory roles
    - Dual and overlapping roles
    - Contrast with personal and SW values
  - Ethical responsibilities
    - Client, student, colleagues and agency
Implicit Factors

- **Providing Feedback**
  Importance in experiential learning
  Student perspective on feedback
  Providing effective feedback

- **Support for Field Instructors**
  From SW Program
  Peer Support
  Ongoing training

**Exercises:**
  Traits of Strong Supervision
  Giving feedback—case exercise
Discussion Questions

- What is your reaction to the information presented?
- What issues related to leniency bias are you struggling with in your program?
- What strategies have you employed?
- What barriers have you encountered?