



Clarifying Roles, Responsibilities and Expectations in Field Placements with Field Instructors and Task Supervisors



UNC
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Purpose

This document is intended to define and clarify the roles of supervisors mentoring MSW students when both a field instructor and task supervisor are working with a student. According to the Council on Social Work Education, MSW students are required to be supervised by a field instructor who has an MSW degree and a minimum of two years of post-graduate professional experience. At times, a field instructor is not available to provide direct supervision for the daily work of the MSW student. In those situations a task supervisor may be assigned by the agency. The task supervisor may hold a degree in another field or have an MSW with less than two years of post-graduate experience.

Occasionally, the field instructor is off-site and is either not an agency staff member, or works in a different unit from the student. If the field instructor is off-site, the role of the task supervisor becomes particularly critical in enhancing student success.

Roles and Responsibilities

Field Instructor

The major responsibilities of the MSW field instructor include helping the student select appropriate learning activities that support the development of social work competencies, evaluating the student's competence, and providing weekly supervision. The field instructor is particularly instrumental in guiding discussions about social work values and ethics, providing a context for the student to understand social work practice, and helping the student integrate theories and skills learned in the classroom with the field setting. The field instructor should communicate regularly with the task supervisor to ensure that a consistent learning experience is provided for the student and to better understand the student's strengths and challenges. The field instructor, task supervisor, and student should participate in a joint meeting with the field faculty three times each academic year.

Off-site field instructors

When there is no MSW field instructor at the agency, an MSW affiliated with the agency may be assigned as the field instructor. The MSW may be a faculty member at the University, work in another program at the agency, or be a board member or volunteer. This individual should have a clear knowledge base of agency functioning and be familiar with the services provided and competencies necessary to be successful within this environment. Social work placements with external supervision can have advantages for students. They can provide placement experiences in non-traditional or emergent fields, allow for expanded multi-disciplinary work, used in rural settings in which MSW's are less available, or may be associated with an employer based placement. There are also potential challenges with this arrangement, such as the lack of

a clearly defined social work role, and limited opportunities for field instructors to directly observe student performance in the placement.

Task Supervisor

Task supervisors guide and shape the student's field experiences on a day to day basis. They offer a variety of learning activities and help the student facilitate completion of daily tasks. The task supervisor should be available to model practice behaviors, observe the student, and provide feedback to the student, field instructor and field faculty about student performance and progress toward achieving competencies.

Field Faculty

The primary responsibility of the field faculty is to support those experiences that enhance the professional development and skills of MSW students. The field faculty is the School of Social Work faculty member who serves as a liaison between the student and the agency. Field faculty foster collaboration between the field instructor, task supervisor and student, and visit the agency several times per academic year to meet with all parties. They are available to troubleshoot should any challenges occur in the placement.

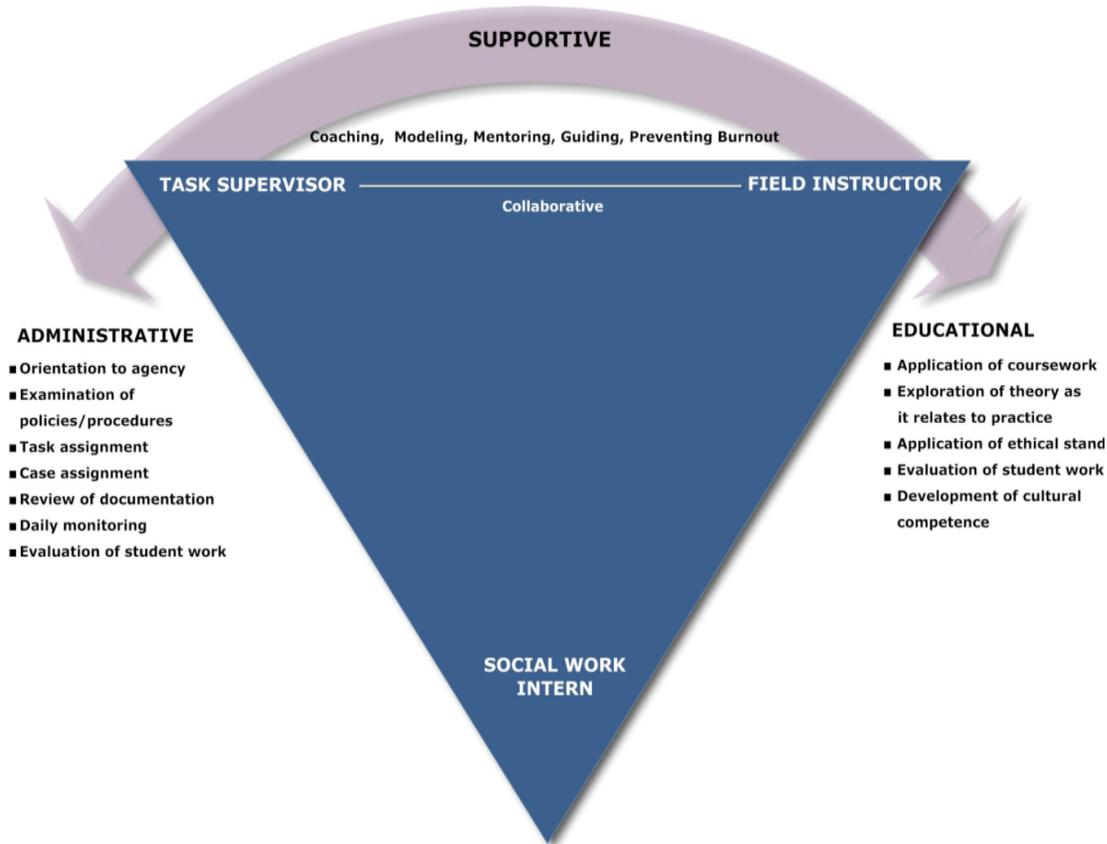
Student

Students are expected to actively engage in translating and applying classroom learning to their experiences in field. Students should schedule weekly supervision with the field instructor and task supervisor and create agendas to guide those sessions. Students are responsible for communicating with the field instructor, task supervisor and field faculty about successes and challenges they experience in field.

Supervision Model

UNC Chapel Hill's model of supervision for Field Education is based upon the work of Alfred Kadushin, who delineates three main types of supervision: administrative, supportive and educational. Administrative supervision involves the day to day management of the student's work which may include discussing and explaining agency policies and procedures, assigning cases or other work tasks, reviewing and explaining paperwork and monitoring the student's casework or other projects. Supportive supervision entails discussing student's emotional reactions to the work and to the profession, and helping the student to develop self-awareness and implement self-care. In educational supervision the typical supervisory tasks include discussing theoretical approaches and strategies for interventions with client systems, reviewing ethical issues, and examining how issues in the social environment and particularly issues of diversity affect the client system. The task supervisor is primarily responsible for

providing administrative supervision while the field instructor provides the bulk of the educational supervision. Both supervisors offer supportive supervision. The diagram below provides a visual representation of the types of supervision each person is responsible for providing.



Strategies for success

When there are a number of different individuals working with the student, frequent, clear, and consistent communication is the key to success. Other critical elements include respect and trust between supervisors, commitment to student learning, and clear and early contracting (Maynard, Mertz & Fortune, 2015). The different responsibilities of the supervisors and characteristics of each supervisor need to be explored and made explicit. Field instructors and task supervisors should create a communication plan such as talking or emailing weekly to check in on how things are going with the student. They should also be mindful of due dates for learning agreement and competency evaluations, and plan to meet to complete those documents together. Finally, if any of the parties experience challenges, they should develop strategies to address them.

Students will need to build a strong relationship with both the field instructor and task supervisor and learn about the context and perspective of each individual. Students should engage in supervision with both the task supervisor and field instructor and should take responsibility for scheduling the hour-long supervisory sessions. Sometimes it works better for students and task supervisors to check in briefly each day to focus on daily tasks. Students should bring questions about tasks directly to the task supervisors.

Students should fully prepare for weekly supervision with the field instructor by creating a thoughtful agenda. Field instructors may ask students to analyze or role play interactions with clients and agency staff, in order to foster student reflection. Field instructors may also assign readings and ask students to do process recordings to compensate for the lack of direct observation of the student's practice. Both the field instructor and task supervisor should collaborate to assist the student in designing the learning agreement, and complete the competency evaluation cooperatively. The field instructor is primarily responsible for the completion of the competency evaluation, but should include feedback from the task supervisor who may have more opportunity to observe student performance. Both should also review and sign the student's monthly report and regularly communicate with each other about the student's progression in developing social work competencies.

Timing

Field Instructor and Task Supervisor Training

If the field instructor and task supervisor are new to UNC Chapel Hill, it is recommended that they participate together in one of the training dates held each summer. During this training they can discuss how the information learned will be applied to their setting and how they will divide responsibilities and establish consistent communication. If the field instructor and task supervisor are unable to attend this training together, it is recommended that they meet prior to interviewing a potential student in order to plan for the field placement and to develop a common understanding of roles and responsibilities. The assigned field faculty is responsible for facilitating this meeting when the students are matched with an agency.

Pre-placement Interview

After a student has been assigned to an agency, the student should contact both the task supervisor and field instructor to schedule a pre-placement interview. It is best if all three can meet and discuss student learning opportunities and roles and responsibilities during the interview.

Orientation

As students begin their field placement, it is very helpful for the task supervisor and field instructor to meet and decide which aspects of orientation each person will provide. Typically, the task supervisor will coordinate orientation to the agency, and the field instructor will offer an overview of the profession, highlighting ethics, and schedule regular supervision with the student. This orientation checklist may be a resource to everyone.

<http://ssw.unc.edu/files/pdf/OrientationChecklist.pdf>

Beginning of Field Placement

During the first six weeks of field, the student should work with the task supervisor and the field instructor to identify learning activities that address the competencies and practice behaviors listed on the learning agreement and to complete the document. The assigned UNC field faculty will schedule a visit in late September or early October with the student, task supervisor and field instructor to review the learning agreement and discuss how the placement is going for all parties. Each month, both the task supervisor and field instructor should review and sign the student's monthly report.

End of Fall Semester

In November (or toward the end of the first semester of placement) the field instructor and task supervisor should meet to discuss the student's progress and to complete their portion of the competency evaluation. They should meet with the student to discuss observed areas of growth and identify competencies and practice behaviors of focus for the spring (or second) semester. The student, task supervisor, and field instructor will also meet with the UNC field faculty to discuss student progress in meeting competencies and to plan for the spring semester.

End of Spring Semester

In April (or toward the end of the field placement) the field instructor and task supervisor should meet again to complete the final competency evaluation. The same process should be used as previously, in which the task supervisor and field instructor meet with the student to discuss student progress, and then all meet with the field faculty.

What if there is a problem?

Even in the best of circumstances, challenges may arise for the student, field instructor or task supervisor. Ideally, consistent communication will help to smooth out any bumps that occur. However, one role of the field faculty is to help navigate any difficult situations, or questions about the field education program. Students, field instructors and task supervisors should not hesitate to contact their assigned field faculty with any questions or concerns.

References

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