

CHAPTER 9: FIELD EDUCATION



Top Left photo: Dorinda Noble and Karen Brown (emerita)



Top Right photo: Catherine Hawkins, Dave Garber (past faculty), Karen Brown, Mrs. Garber)

Dr. Brown's Retirement Reception 2011



Middle Left photo: Ted Watkins (emeritus), Mary Tijerina, Anne Deepak



Middle Right photo: Lisa Tobias, Sonya Kraus, Terry Pacheco



Bottom Left photo: Raphael Travis, Betty Watkins, Ted Watkins (emeritus), Jerry McKimney



Bottom Right photo: Amy Russell, Christine Norton, Karen Knox, Hortencia Garza



BSW Field Education: Making the Connection

How Field Links Curriculum and Social Work Practice

Texas State's Field program gives students the opportunity to apply, integrate, and strengthen the learning they have gained in the classroom. Students in the BSW field practicum courses, SOWK 4645 Field I and SOWK 4650 Field II, are placed in generalist agencies for a total of over 500 hours under supervision. The placement occurs after the student has completed all other courses in the general curriculum and in the major, and after the student successfully applies to the Field Office. During placement, students immerse themselves in the agency activities. The agency-based instructor, who is vetted by the Field Office, is supported by the faculty field liaison. Students participate in field seminars, completing focused assignments and learning from each other. The Faculty Liaison confers with the agency at least three times per semester, normally by visiting the agency on-site. In addition, Faculty Liaisons are available to confer with the student or agency by technology or on-site as needed.

“Education today, more than ever before, must see clearly the dual objectives: education for living and educating for making a living.”
—James Mason Wood



EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.3. —Signature Pedagogy: Field Education. Signature pedagogy represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioner. Professionals have pedagogical norms with which they connect and integrate theory and practice. (4) In social work, the signature pedagogy is field education. The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting. It is a basic precept of social work education that the two interrelated components of curriculum—classroom and field—are of equal importance within the curriculum, and each contributes to the development of the requisite competencies of professional practice. Field education is systematically

designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program competencies.

Field syllabi clearly express how the course goals match our School's goals and our ideal of preparing generalist BSW social workers. They also lay out the competencies and practice behaviors, and how those will be measured.

Accreditation Standard 2.1—Field Education. *The program discusses how its field education program*

✓ **2.1.1** *Connects the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practice setting, fostering the implementation of evidence-informed practice.*

✓ **B2.1.2** *Provides generalist practice opportunities for students to demonstrate the core competencies.*

✓ **2.1.3** *Provides a minimum of 400 hours of field education for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for master's programs.*

✓ **2.1.4** *Admits only those students who have met the program's specified criteria for field education.*

✓ **2.1.5** *Specifies policies, criteria, and procedures for selecting field settings; placing and monitoring students; maintaining field liaison contacts with field education settings; and evaluating student learning and field setting effectiveness congruent with the program's competencies.*

✓ **2.1.6** *Specifies the credentials and practice experience of its field instructors necessary to design field learning opportunities for students to demonstrate program competencies. Field instructors for baccalaureate students hold a baccalaureate or master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program. Field instructors for master's students hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program. For cases in which a field instructor does not hold a CSWE-accredited social work degree, the program assumes responsibility for reinforcing a social work perspective and describes how this is accomplished.*

✓ **2.1.7** *Provides orientation, field instruction training, and continuing dialog with field education settings and field instructors.*

✓ **2.1.8** *Develops policies regarding field placements in an organization in which the student is also employed. To ensure the role of student as learner, student assignments and field education supervision are not the same as those of the student's employment.*

Overview of BSW Field: the Signature Pedagogy

Field internship (or “field placement” or “field practicum”) is the signature pedagogy of social work education, the experience in which everything students learned in class comes together in practical application. Texas State highly values field placement and invests in it. Our agency-based partners frequently praise the preparation of Texas State students, saying they prefer Texas State students to those of other schools because of that high level of preparation.

The distinction between field and the classroom at Texas State is fluid and indistinct, with much dynamic movement. Faculty who handle field also teach classroom courses, so there is considerable cross-fertilization and synergy

between field and class. Texas State agency-based field instructors also help bring the vitality and timeliness of the social services and agencies to the classroom by offering frequent guest lectures and sometimes serving as adjunct teachers. Students focus on what the evidence demonstrates as most effective practice in the field setting. They connect practice knowledge and skills with experience. The experience is entirely consistent with the School's mission to prepare social workers to work with the most vulnerable clients, and our field agencies provide that experience for them.

- Students submit Daily and Weekly Logs in their integrative field seminar. This exercise calls for them to specifically link their course content with the internship experience, reflecting upon their developing use of self in practice. The field process focuses on integrating theoretical and evidence-based cognitive material with practice wisdom and experience.
- In integrative seminar, students study how to apply the basic techniques and skills of generalist social work practice (such as observation, data collection, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of interventions). They also explore career options and learn to think of themselves as professionals.
- Students also do a Macro Project (with literature review), which requires them to identify theoretical approaches and best practices in their projects. They must also write a section identifying evidence-informed practice strategies and the evaluation or outcome measures they use in the project.
- Field seminars, which are highly interactive, encourage students to share their field experiences, the particulars of their field agencies, and the theoretical approaches they are learning in the agency. Faculty liaisons talk with students individually about the connections they are making between classroom learning and agency practice experiences.
- Field students also do an Ethics Paper assessing the ethical dimensions of a case to discuss with other field seminar participants. In fact, field seminar focuses a great deal of time teaching students to negotiate the complex area of ethics and values. They discuss at length professional ethical codes as well as state regulatory laws. Students are expected to conduct themselves professionally and legally in the field setting, addressing social work values and ethics in their individual educational contracts.
- Students explore the richness of diversity they are learning in field, and explore ways to develop more tolerance and advocate for justice for all clients and client groups. Students deal with social justice and related ethical issues in multiple field assignments, including the Educational Contract, the Agency Paper, and the Ethics Paper.
- Grading criteria for all field assignments is clearly laid out in the field course syllabi. Students also receive the comprehensive Field Manual as well as the School Student Handbook, which gives them a wealth of information about the field process and goals.
- Students do not receive any academic credit in field or in class for life experiences, and this is clearly stated in the Field Manual.
- Field students learn about the social service landscape. In fact, integrative seminars often convene in placement agencies, so that students can get a flavor of types of settings other than their own placements. In addition to seminar discussion and assignments, they can tour the agency and learn about client resources the agency offers. While agency-based field instructors may host such gatherings and teach agency-based seminars, students often

Texas State School of Social Work consistently sends one of the state's largest student contingents to Student Day at the Legislature. In 2011, in fact, we sent 100 students, a far larger contingent than any other Texas program. Sen. Castro (D-San Antonio), looking out over the sea of turquoise Texas State t-shirts, said, "I see that Texas State is here. Are any other schools here?"

take the lead in orienting their colleagues to their field agencies during these agency visits.

Abel, a Spanish-speaking Hispanic graduate of the BSW program, completed his BSW internship at a hospice. He has gone on to be a successful administrator in a hospice, where he advocates tirelessly for policies and practices that address Hispanic patients' needs.

Generalist Practice in Field. Texas State BSW students work in generalist agencies to prepare for working with vulnerable populations in public agencies. Most of our BSW students are placed in public agencies, such as public child welfare and Communities in Schools, where students learn generalist skills, using an eclectic knowledge base that focuses on the strength-based systems perspective in micro, mezzo, and macro situations. Students also integrate developmental theories, understanding of human diversity, and professional values. Since most BSW field students function in practicum settings that directly serve client systems, they must know how to interview, conduct assessments and set goals, identify strategies to prevent and ameliorate problems, evaluate their professional activities, lead groups, work with colleagues, and influence policy. They must be able to implement programs and policies, changing them when necessary, and developing new ones. These generalist skills are affected by values, ethics, and laws. Our BSW students must be able to apply ethical constructs to case situations, as well as to abide by relevant laws.

Field Hours and Evaluation. BSW students must work 500 hours in the agency under supervision. This number significantly exceeds the standard. Most students complete these hours in a block placement, though the Field Office will try to accommodate students whose life circumstances make a full-time block placement highly difficult (particularly those who are employed 20 or more hours per week, who must complete field over two contiguous semesters). The student spends 32-40 hours per week in her/his assigned agency for a block field placement, or 18-20 hours for a part-time field placement.

The School evaluates BSW field students on the basis of their abilities to master the core competencies, as measured on their Mid-Term and Final Field Evaluations, specifically the Macro Project.

Admitting BSW Students to Field

To be admitted to field, official Social Work majors:

- Must have completed all general degree requirements and all required courses for the BSW, excluding field;
- Must have a GPA of 2.75 in social work courses, excluding field;
- Must officially apply for internship through the School Field Office by completing the Field Application form, submitting a two-page social history, being academically approved by the Advisor, completing personal interviews with the Field Coordinator or field staff, and purchasing professional liability insurance through the School's designated insurance provider.

Only students who meet these criteria will be admitted to Field.

Policies and Procedures that Guide Field

The School's Field Office, with the input of the School's faculty Field Oversight Committee, develops and publishes a comprehensive Field Manual, which is available in print or on the School web site. The Field Office has a specific page

on the School web site, where students and agency-based Field instructors can secure the information they need. In addition, Field Office faculty visit junior and senior BSW classes to discuss field. All potential field students must attend a pre-registration conference with the assigned faculty field liaison, as well as Pre-Field Orientation meeting. Field faculty orient agency-based Field instructors. Field information, consequently, is easily available to all parties.

Selecting Field Settings. Texas State has at least 200 different field placement sites that allow the student to extend and apply generalist knowledge and skills, though that number is fluid since the Field Office is constantly reviewing existing field sites and recruiting new sites. The agency or site benefits by having the contributions students give in delivering agency services and in broadening agency perspectives by sharing their academic learning. Field Office faculty meet with potential placement sites and review agency materials to ensure that the agency or site meets the following criteria:

- The Practicum site's philosophy of service is compatible with social work's professional philosophy, values, and ethics, and the site provides a social work service or planning function that relates to improving human services.
- The site's purpose and function are compatible with the School's mission and curriculum, and the site provides a range of learning experiences consistent with the agency service functions, the student's learning needs, and the objectives of SOWK 4645 and 4650 Field Placement.
- The agency personnel respect the educational focus of field placement, and support Texas State University's nondiscriminatory policies and practices, as well as other University policies that apply to field placement.
- The practicum site has access to qualified Field Instructors (typically licensed social workers) and will provide support for Field Instructors to carry out field instruction responsibilities and to attend field-related training and meetings.
- The staff is large enough to ensure that the basic agency program is developed and maintained sufficiently without relying on students.
- Sites are able to provide students with suitable space, equipment, supplies, support, and safety measures to facilitate student learning activities in the agency.
- The agency agrees to work cooperatively with the Field Office to meet educational goals and to support students in completing their field seminar assignments. The agency agrees to alert the Office of any agency changes that affect students and field supervision.
- Once the agency and the Field Office agree that all criteria are met, the agency and the University execute an Affiliation Agreement between the School of Social Work, the College of Applied Arts, and the Practicum Site, which is updated regularly. Students are not placed in an agency until this Affiliation Agreement is in place.

Selecting Agency-Based Field Instructors. The Field Office carefully examines the credentials of agency-based field instructors, and potential instructors must submit a Field Instructor Profile and vita for consideration. Our field instructors hold the BSW or MSW (typically the MSW) from CSWE-accredited programs, and the vast majority are licensed social workers. All our field instructors have more than two years of practice experience.

In 2005 Blanca completed her BSW field placement at a family eldercare agency, where she fell in love with working with the elderly. She went on to earn a nursing certificate in Guatemala and is back at Texas State, where she is an MSW student and will be doing field placement in a hospice.

Lakeisha did her placement in the state agency charged with protecting the elderly. She came to Field Seminar, saying that her client “keeps asking me about my religious views and wants to take me to church with her. How should I handle this?” The group had a vigorous discussion about the boundaries of sharing personal beliefs, about responding to personal questions, and about honoring what is important to the client.

The agency-based field instructor selects appropriate case activities for the student and oversees the student’s work. Therefore, the agency-based instructor must be well qualified and willing to teach, supervise, and be a professional role model. The instructor must meet with the student for one hour per week of supervision, planning and evaluating the student’s work. The agency-based instructor also submits mid-term and final written evaluations on forms that the Field Office provides; these forms incorporate the School’s competencies and practice behavior for the field experience. These evaluations provide the framework at a three-way mid-term and final evaluation conference between the Field faculty, the agency instructor, and the student, at which all parties discuss the student’s progress, accomplishments and areas in need of professional development. The agency-based instructor also commits to informing the Field Office timely of any problems that emerge in the placement experience, so that these issues can be handled appropriately.

Though it happens rarely, a student may be placed in an entity, such as a legislator’s office, in which there is no qualified social work instructor on site. In these cases, the Field Office uses an Off-Site Field Instructor (a qualified social worker) and an On-Site Preceptor. The Off-Site Instructor meets the criteria for a field instructor, and works with the student and On-Site Preceptor to create the Educational Contract, with its learning objectives and tasks. The Instructor meets weekly for at least an hour with the student in supervision, and meets regularly with the student and On-Site Preceptor to assess the student’s learning and work progress. The Off-Site Instructor takes primary responsibility for submitting written evaluations as required by the Field Office, and meets with the Field faculty liaison. The On-Site Preceptor orients the student to the agency and its work and supervises the student’s daily work activities. He/she also communicates regularly with the Off-Site Instructor about the student’s work.

Placing Students in Field. Once a student has applied for field, the Field Office faculty review and assess the application, ensuring that the student meets all requirements to be admitted to field. Field faculty personally interview each applicant to discuss the applicant’s learning needs and career goals. Faculty then designate approximately three agencies that potentially match the student’s needs, and the student sets up face-to-face interviews with the agency-based field instructors. Field faculty and agency instructors then confer, and the Field faculty make the final placement decision, matching students with agencies. If the agency requires a criminal background check, drug test, or immunizations, the student must comply with agency policy prior to actual placement. Students do not make unsolicited approaches to field placement sites or attempt to create their own placement; the Field Office makes all placements.

Monitoring Field Placements. Texas State School of Social Work is very engaged with placement students and their agency-based instructors. Overseeing the field placement learning regime is a specialized activity which requires both commitment and understanding of applied learning. Faculty who are interested in and skilled at working with field learning are assigned field courses, which means they work with the field process from placement decisions through teaching integrative field seminar to dealing personally with the

placement instructor and agency. They work under the direction of the Field Coordinator. These faculty are our Field Liaison faculty.

The Field Liaison, after helping to create a student-agency-instructor partnership that best meets the student's learning needs, is responsible for creating a cohesive learning experience that benefits all partners. This process requires excellent communication skills. The Liaison combines face-to-face contacts with web-based and other technological communication to track placement progress and address any problems timely. The School will provide web-cameras and mikes to agency instructors if that strategy helps smooth communication.

The Field Liaison has at least three conferences per semester with the student and instructor, and often has other conferences, at which the Field Liaison helps craft and refine the student's Educational Contract. The Field Liaison helps the agency-based instructor to understand the School's competencies and practice behaviors, and how those are frameworks for our educational efforts. After the Field Liaison ensures that the agency-based instructor executes midterm and final student evaluations, the Field Liaison assigns a final grade for the course.

As the faculty of record for the field course, the Field Liaison teaches the seminar, engaging students, directing conversation, presenting specific materials, and guiding students in developing their seminar assignments (case assessments, case recordings, and integrative papers and projects). The Field Liaison gives helpful feedback on these activities.

Occasionally, because of a change in agency circumstances or the student's life events or other considerations, a placement does not work well. In those cases, the Field Liaison, with input from the student and field instructor, assesses the problems and their causes, adjusting the placement structure or processes or making a change in the placement, all in consultation with the Field Coordinator. In those rare cases when a student's behavior necessitates termination from field, the Field Liaison, in concert with the Field Coordinator, works to handle this situation professionally with the student and the agency.

Evaluating Field Placements. Not only is the student evaluated in field, but the student, agency instructor, and field liaison also formally evaluate the entire field experience. The information emerging from this evaluative process is important for the Field Office to continue to refine and improve its process and content.

Training and Dialogue. Agency-based field instructors are critical partners in our educational enterprise. The School greatly values their input, and in fact, uses them as informal advisors to the School on curriculum. The Field Office provides instructors with field orientations and free, innovative trainings (two-three times a year) on a number of topics, such as ethics, supervision techniques, problem-solving, and other knowledge. Increasingly, these trainings are available to instructors via the web, and the Field Office is working to develop more web-assisted trainings for field instructors on a broad range of useful topics. Field instructors may earn up to 5 Continuing Education Credits per

Doing her field placement in a facility for the elderly, Sara had trouble connecting with Mrs. Jones. Sara finally brought her lap top to the facility and, using a program that displayed current images of geographical locations, Sara showed Mrs. Jones pictures of places that had meaning for Mrs. Jones. That activity broke the ice, and Sara and Mrs. Jones developed a strong working relationship.

Joy, an Asian American field student, did her placement in a child welfare agency. She visited the home of a Mexican American client and was surprised to find the client cooking healthy foods. Joy shared her response with the field seminar, saying that she realized she had a stereotype of Mexican Americans eating only high-fat, high-calorie foods. The field seminar had a vigorous discussion about their various stereotypes about different cultures.

semester. Field instructors also receive a comprehensive Field Practicum Manual that informs them about how Texas State School of Social Work organizes and sequences its curriculum, and identifies practice and evaluation goals for field practicum. And faculty field liaisons are always available to consult with the field instructors.

Field Fair and Research Forum. Beginning in 2009, the Field Office began sponsoring an Annual Field Fair. This well-received event brings field instructors and agency personnel together with students. Agencies can recruit volunteers at this event, such as pre-major students in SOWK 2375 Social Services in the Community, who do a 50-hour volunteer project. The School also sponsors a Student Research Forum in which students have the opportunity to display poster presentations of their research to field instructors, faculty, and community partners.

Using Field Instructors as School Curriculum Advisors. The School also solicits ideas from instructors to enhance our curriculum and make it more timely and applicable. The Field Office, for instance, ran a series of focus groups with instructors to help the School learn which competencies and practice behaviors our BSW graduates most need to know in order to be successful in the current work world. Field instructors provide the link between practice and education that helps the School keep curriculum and policy contemporary and appropriate for the changing landscape in social work practice.

Placement in the Student's Employing Agency. Though the School's policy mandates that students complete their practicum at an agency where the student is not and has not been employed, occasionally an employed student may formally request in writing to complete placement in the student's employing agency. The School typically will do this only if there is no other viable placement choice for the student, and if the agency is large and complex enough to allow the student to be placed in a different service area (such as the public child welfare agency) under different qualified supervision. The plan for such a placement must be in writing and must be approved prior to placement.

The employing agency must have a social work focus, must agree to give the student release time to complete placement in the different area of the agency, and must construct field work assignments to ensure that the student gets qualitatively new and challenging educational content in the placement agency. The student's field instructor must not be the same person who supervises the student on the job. This type of placement arrangement is an exception; a student is not allowed to do more than one placement in his/her place of employment.