

FIELD PRACTICUM CONTRACT DEVELOPMENT WORK PLANS & GRADUATED ASSIGNMENTS

Practicum assignments are uniquely created at each practicum site through the development of the *Field Practicum Contract*. This education contract is a teaching and learning plan which outlines a developmentally graduated description of the Anne & Henry Zarrow School of Social Work program competencies which must be incorporated into the practicum experience and addressed at each site. The first major practicum assignment at all sites is the development of the contract.

The primary intent of this assignment is to create an arc of understanding which spans the duration of the practicum and helps the student bring the world of the practicum site and the world of the School together. This confluence of the education contract and the practicum site offers the student a way to tie the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the classroom to the practicum experience through required program competencies and practice behaviors. This confluence creates a learning process in which the student can view the site through the lens of the social work perspective, and apply social work values and knowledge to the development of professional skills in actual social work practice.

At the practicum site, during the first weeks of the practicum, the student works with the field instructor to identify or create practicum activities and assignments which can be incorporated into each competency area of the contract. These activities are recorded in the *Work Plans* feature of the contract. *Work Plans* are a practicum “game plan.”

In order to identify site activities, the student follows the directives of the *Practice Tasks* feature which is linked to each *Work Plan*. The student must come to understand why each set of *Practice Tasks* is bundled together under each competency area of the contract; how the tasks are relevant to the competency; and how they are related to each other. Then, through the guidance of the field instructor, the student develops *Work Plans* describing how he or she will go about acquiring and demonstrating program competencies while engaging in assignments and activities which are grounded in the mission, context, culture, and work of the practicum site.

At the school, during the early weeks of the practicum, the faculty liaison assists students with the development of *Work Plans*, with an emphasis on tying practicum activities directly to program competencies, insuring that practicum assignments, in addition to being instructional, are designed to create opportunities for the student to acquire program competencies, and receive instructive feedback and evaluation of their competency performance. As the contract is being developed, the faculty liaison may review drafts as requested, and require revisions as needed, in order to insure student demonstration of program competencies in the practicum.

The *Field Practicum Contract* is a working document. *Work Plans* should be continually revised throughout the course of the practicum in response to ongoing feedback about student performance, instructor suggestions, new opportunities that come along, or changes taking place at the practicum site. Students and instructors together can develop “*Strategies to Increase Competence*” throughout the practicum, i.e. ways in which competency practice behaviors can be

further improved. In this way, feedback and improvement planning are structured into ongoing development of the education contract.

By the end of the practicum, contract *Work Plans* should reflect all of the learning experiences which have been incorporated into the practicum. However, initial *Work Plans* must be developed as fully as possible during the first weeks of the practicum. During this time, the student is responsible for attending pre-practicum contract training; attending required contract help sessions with the faculty liaison (liaisons schedule and notify their students about these meetings); initiating contract development discussions with the field instructor; utilizing contract development aids which are posted on the school website; requesting liaison assistance as needed; and, completing and submitting *Work Plans* for each competency area of the contract by the date which appears on the Practicum Calendar for each practicum course.

The initial *Field Practicum Contract* is approved and signed by both the field instructor and the faculty liaison, and must be submitted by the due date which appears on the Practicum Calendar for each practicum course. Students may not continue in the practicum course without approval and submission of the contract. A student who fails to develop a *Field Practicum Contract* which directly ties practicum activities at the site to program competencies, and insures that these assignments are designed to create opportunities for instructive feedback and assessment of performance, will be awarded a grade of Unsatisfactory and will not continue in the practicum course.

Developing Work Plans: General Principles

- Begin by stepping back from everything and start with the “big picture”, i.e. the system, its purpose, social work roles, and how the student’s activities will fit into this picture. (E.g. “We are the only connection in this hospital between the NICU and OB Units for this family. We are the only humans who connect the Mother patient to the Baby patient. We are a human bridge”) (E.g., We are intervention specialists - our involvement, what we do here, changes the course of things for these juvenile offenders, hopefully forever.”)
- Ask yourself “What are the 10 things I want this student to learn about being a social worker in this setting & in this practice area of social work?”
- Take stock of your environment. Identify a broad range of activities, roles, skills development, key people, etc. Think of yourself as a guide who will direct students to these learning experiences through the creation of practicum assignments specific to your setting.
- Map out a schedule of all relevant site venues, work activities and events that should/could be included in the practicum experience.

- Students are REQUIRED to secure classroom & practicum schedules that incorporate **all CORE site activities**, i.e. activities without which the integrity of the learning experience would be compromised. Set up a weekly schedule that includes these opportunities. Include any specialized training that might apply. Examples:
 - Case conferences
 - Interdisciplinary meetings/treatment team meetings/staff meetings
 - Community meetings
 - Interaction with other students, interns, residents
 - Staff development activities / In-service training
 - Seminars/speakers/ presentations
 - Special training required of students
 - Online training opportunities

- Other Teaching & Learning Venues That Might Be Available
 - Clinical staffing; grand rounds
 - Interaction with other students, interns, residents
 - Visiting related agency sites; shadowing at other sites; attending in-service or trainings at other sites
 - Attending relevant conferences or workshops
 - OUTSA Professional Development Funds- \$250/fall and spring semesters for reimbursement of conferences, workshops, etc.
 - 3 hour online course “Understanding the NASW Code of Ethics” (www.naswweb.org)
 - NASW/APA Websites offer ethical dilemmas each month
 - Juvenile Personnel Training Program (NRCYS) No charge to students, catalog (e.g. trauma-informed care)

- Over time, identify Field Practicum Contract elements that could be included or just mentioned in the **student’s site orientation**. Look at *Practicum Site Orientations* for activity & assignment ideas.

- For some instructors, setting up a **supervisory structure** will be a very important planning task. Some placements will involve the incorporation of (possibly numerous) **preceptors and possibly off-site activities** that offer desired/needed/required additional opportunities for students.

- “What is the scope/arc of the social worker’s responsibility at your site?” Identify key MSW level social work **practice processes** that occur at your site “What do social workers do here?” These processes may incorporate several field contract competencies. Develop exposure, activities & assignments around each step of these processes.

- Orient the student about how the work will progress through various stages and how this progression will be paced and based upon ongoing evaluation of performance, “We’ll see how you do with this assignment, then we’ll go from there...”
- Students should move from initial observing to doing. In the PRACTICE competency, you will be asked to record the student’s level of learning involvement for each practice step.
 - 1 = Read about or receive oral information
 - 2 = Shadowed during client system interactions
 - 3 = Shared responsibility for parts of an interaction/project
 - 4 = Took full responsibility for parts of interaction/project
 - 5 = Took full leadership in organizing interaction/project
 - 6 = Took full leadership in implementing interaction/project
- Responsibility and autonomy should grow throughout the practicum.
- As much as possible **situate the student as a learner**, i.e. in activities that involve new learning. Ask “have you done this before?”
- When assigning cases to students, the student should not be the primary worker assigned to a case. The primary worker should be an employee. The student should have secondary responsibility, i.e., be a learner who is assisting the primary social worker.
- Assignments: “how can I construct a task which serves as an instructional tool, requires students to tie new knowledge to its application in practice, and poses an opportunity to assess learning?”
- As much as possible, create assignments that allow for a learning process that involves an **action & reflection loop**. The contract naturally promotes ongoing focused reflection and discussion with the field instructor. Ideally, there should be a good balance of activity and integrative reflection and discussion.
- Create student experiences in which it is understood that mistakes will be made and allowed for as a natural and valuable part of the learning process.

- Envision assignments through an “education prism” as opposed to a “job performance” prism. Apply the same principle in relationship to student “progress” versus “productivity.”
- **Generalize:** relate assignments to general social work knowledge, values and skills. “This is why you are learning this...all social workers do this (e.g. assessments)...this is how we do it here...and this is why we do it this way in this program...”
- **Be mindful of the student evaluation and grading process in the creation of assignments.** Create assignments where the student can be observed or provide feedback to you about performance.
- It is important that **evaluation unfold as ongoing feedback** which improves the student’s chance of succeeding. Evaluation should be an ongoing conversation. However, you will be asked to evaluate and rate specific performance of professional practice behaviors and site evidence to support your ratings at the end of each grading period.
- As much as possible, **build self-critique into assignments** and model this stance for students in relationship to your own work.
- Many students will need a **slower teaching & learning progression** before the integration and application of competencies are more reflexive.
- **Compartmentalize assignments that involve a long process;** as much as possible break these activities into steps; create assignments and an evaluation/feedback process for each step.
- **Develop ways to evaluate student performance throughout the course of the practicum and let students know how this will happen:** e.g. successful completion of formal trainings, instructor observation, evaluations from presentations given, other staff feedback, client feedback, quizzes, etc.

- Even if you have already had a former student do an assignment involving research in a particular topic (e.g. best practices for your agency) and therefore you already know what that student found, remember that the research process itself is a valuable learning experience. **The exact same research assignment can be given to subsequent students.**

- Utilize journaling and process recording as a means of creating a window into the student's perspective, values, attitudes, judgment, professional stance and integration of theory.

- Utilize journaling and process recording as a means of developing professional self-awareness; professional boundaries; complex, subtle and nuanced clinical communication skills; pacing and timing; empathic professional stance, etc.

Field Practicum Contract: Work Plan Tips & Strategies

- **It is critical to read through the FPC as a narrative, line by line**
 - Many implicit understandings have been spelled out, made explicit (this is especially valuable for new instructors, e.g. the Practice, Supervision, Professional Behavior competencies)
 - This has made the contract longer
 - The Quick Glance tool simplifies the contract once you are familiar with the long version

- **The traditional format for field education contract assignments & activities:**

The student will.....	(Verb)	...give identifying details, no acronyms, etc.
	observe...	
	shadow...	
	interview...	
	read...	
	lead, co-lead...	
	research...	
	organize...	
	analyze, critique...	

Use language that relates the activity/assignment to the “practice tasks,” i.e. the contract “home.”

- DP Learning Activities: Some Bullets

- Site orientation (see document)
 - Manuals (student, agency, referral resources)
 - Online resources (training)
 - In-service, required training
 - Website

- Field Contract Development
 - Field Instructor supervision

- Reviewing closed case records
 - Observing/shadowing
 - Interviewing
 - Home visits
 - Client caseload
 - Court hearings
 - On-call, crisis line
 - Client, collateral telephone contacts
 - Audio-visual recording & reviewing
 - Client documentation
 - Case conferences, treatment team meetings

- Meetings, community meetings
 - Touring & site visits/shadowing
 - Community projects
 - Workshop, seminar, conference
 - NASW online ethics training

- Reading
 - Journaling, activity log
 - Process recording
 - Reflective, integrative writing
 - Student presentations

- Practice tasks operationalize the 41 CSWE Practice Behaviors. Practice tasks are sets of instructions for student & instructors.
 - Some tasks are more specific and will be a full assignment.
 - Think of assignments & activities in which multiple practice tasks, and the themes and issues surrounding and unifying these tasks, can come to life in your actual practice setting
 - In the contracts, some tasks are already **thematically clustered** and could be **bundled into one assignment**.
 - More advanced students should be able to cluster tasks with the help of their instructors and turn them into assignments.

- Instructors can **bundle** practice behaviors and create assignments in which the student demonstrates a set of competencies.** These assignments can take many forms:
 - Case synopsis or analysis illustrating particular competencies
 - Case presentations
 - Process recordings
 - A central practice process (e.g. a Research-Theory-Practice loop)
 - Student journal
 - Audio-video recordings of competency performance
 - Instructor observations of client interactions
 - Written assignments
 - Client documentation / reports
 - Presentations to groups
 - Focused discussions (recorded in supervision conference form)
 - Direct observation of student performance (e.g. assessment interviewing)
 - Requisite self reflection or integration paper
 - Participation in agency or community meeting(s)
 - Behavior checklist or assessment measuring particular competencies (completed by client, colleagues, or other social workers)

**A bundling comparison: In Child Welfare CORE Training, one family is used as a unifying & integrating example throughout the entire training process.

**Gena Massey has offered an example of a bundling assignment in a hospital setting:

The discharge planning role bumps to the MSW level of social work through consideration of a new Medicare policy (re-hospitalization within 30 days of a discharge) by linking the new policy to its impact on social work at the site.

“What is the impact of this policy on caregivers?”

“Do our models of assessment adequately take the needs of caregivers into account?”

“What does this change mean in terms of the hospital’s need for social work-trained discharge planners?”

“How could an increased need for social workers be demonstrated to hospital officials?”

This professional level MSW process links (POLICY) + (RESEARCH) + (HBSE) + (PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY) + (PRACTICE) + (ADVOCACY)

→ for a total of (6) contract competencies

- Bundling can be used to create “completion measures”, i.e. ways a student can be evaluated in many areas of competence at the pinnacle of their learning achievements.
- In the concentration year placement, one semester of the placement always takes place concurrently with the direct practice integrative seminar (a 3 hour course.) This seminar class utilizes detailed decision cases to explore numerous settings and dilemmas that a social worker might find in actual practice, and it prepares students for the Comprehensive Exam. One case in this seminar will be drawn from the student’s practicum.
- Well developed work plans, written with descriptive information, can act as memory prompts for field instructors when documenting “evidence to support ratings”
- Work plan assignments & activities can span the whole practicum; however, evaluation must relate only to the practice behavior and tasks indicated for the portion of the practicum being evaluated
- **Clinical Social Work Practicum Progression : This Varies by Site**
 - Shadowing → Co-facilitating → Taking the lead
 - Funding sources dictate the rules of reimbursement for client services. An example, if 3rd party reimbursement is involved, licensed instructor/preceptor is always in the room with the student
 - However, some Mental Health grants and/or sliding fee scale services do not require the presence of a licensed professional
 - Mock assessment, treatment plans, case notes → instructor review of student documentation and later destruction , or
 - Official case notes, etc. → licensed instructor “countersigning” the official documentation
 - Mental Health: the BHRS role can bump to the MSW level of social work role by integrating a clinical role & clinical supervision into these services with newly assigned clients
- **The HBSE Competency:** Instructors are using theory all the time, but the student must learn what, when and how to utilize various theories. Instructors who have practiced for a long time, and have incorporated myriad theories into their work, will be challenged to identify all of the conceptualizations that are guiding their work. However, it is important that the instructor attempt to do just that. This will take time, especially for experienced practitioners.

- By highlighting/coding/labeling private thinking constructs and giving voice to this process, students will get a chance to observe theory in action.
- Home Visits

If home visitation is a part of the role of the social worker within the practicum agency, practicum students are permitted to make home visits unaccompanied, or in the company of agency staff, provided they have had thorough training prior to making the first home visit.

If no training is offered for high-risk or potentially volatile home visits, contact the Faculty Liaison for advisement. Students who make unaccompanied home visits must have access to back-up coverage from staff at the practicum site.
- If Crisis Line coverage is a part of the role of social workers within the practicum agency, practicum students may provide such coverage:
 - Any time providing hotline coverage should be a very limited part of the practicum experience.
 - Student must agree willingly to this assignment
 - Student must have completed agency training on hotline coverage
 - Student must have access to back-up coverage from staff at the practicum site.
- Field instructors should secure that students are not practicing in any manner that would make them legally vulnerable. In the concentration year, this oversight can be turned into a student assignment to research the following dimensions of practice at the practicum site:
 - scope of practice
 - standards of practice
 - practice protocols
 - documentation
 - client records
 - signing off
 - reimbursement issues
- Instructors: Don't forget activities that you have not had time to get to.

If these items match well with the student's educational objectives and find a natural home somewhere in the Field Practicum Contract, these activities may be great learning opportunities for the student.

Some examples:

 - A coalition meeting/report may be perfect for your student
 - Updating the agency's community resources directory (foundation year)
 - Clients who need follow-up phone calls
 - Best practices you never have time to research
 - Clinical research for a specific client population

- University of Buffalo School of Social Work: Field Education Activities List (Competency based drop down menus organized by practicum level)
<http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/msw/field/activities.asp>

Work Plan Development: First Time Strategies

Before You Meet With Your Student

Begin with your **VISION** for a practicum experience

Survey your **environment** (Montessori analogy – the prepared environment)

Ask yourself: “**What would I want to learn?**”

Identify the “**10 things**” you want the student to learn/know by the end of the practicum

Identify critical **exposures** and **experiences** that you want to incorporate

Identify the essential social work **practice processes** at your site

Identify **important discussions** you know you want to have with your student

Think outside the box – Your work extends beyond your own walls, and beyond your own site.

Your student can engage in activities away from the site.

Then, PREP

Read *Creating Work Plans & Graduated Assignments*, the entire document

Read **line-by-line**, as a **NARRATIVE Quick Glance with Work Plan Feature** (make sure you are in the right one!)

Using the Quick Glance Tool

Once you have **PREPPED**, return to the beginning using *Quick Glance with Work Plan Feature* and start writing

Find relevant **contract “home(s)”** for the things you know you want your student to experience and write them in. **Skip the details for now.** Just plug things in where they need to go. And, remember, one single activity may belong in numerous “homes.”

Include the **important discussions** you know you want to have with your student over the course of the practicum. (The contracts very naturally suggest places for these discussions; and, focused integrative discussions with the instructor are the critical matrix of all student assignments.)

When you have finished these steps, identify **contract “holes”**, i.e. empty spaces, these holes mark off experiences/assignments you will have to create, or ask others to either help you with, or perhaps actually provide for your student. At the school, practice behavior “homes & holes” were located in course syllabi

You have **MAPPED** your site to the **CSWE Competencies & Practice Behaviors**

You are ready for *Essential Conversations* with your student

How Your Student Will Help

Students will play an important ONGOING role in the development of your own FPC template, because they are asked to add to the contract all the practicum activities which emerge DURING the practicum. They are motivated to do this.

During the practicum, both you and your student will keep ADDING PRACTICUM ACTIVITIES to the original draft the student submitted to the school for contract approval.

Save your student’s FINAL contract to:

Use as a **starting point** for your next student

Use to create **your own template**

Be sure to look in *Strategies to Increase Performance* for assignments you may have tucked away in these hidey-holes

The more you structure your student’s experience; the more you incorporate your past contracts into your revisions; the easier your next student will be for you; and the easier it will be to assess, prepare for, monitor, pace, manage and evaluate different kinds of students. You will be well on your way to being a “seasoned” field instructor.

Advanced: Your Own Week-by-Week View

From the vantage point of the field instructor, the education contract is chopped up, i.e. it is organized around competencies the student must achieve, i.e. it is **not a daily or weekly flow of learning experiences**

You will eventually be able to arrange a **chronological progression** of learning activities, an instructional design that makes sense, is one that you like, one that is aesthetically pleasing to you, one that is manageable, and covers all of the contract's required competency ground

Instructor Resource: Gena's Massey's Week by Week Work Plans (for health & medical sites, generically written)

Ken Moore's Use of Excel to create Week by Week Work Plans

For example, you will identify ways to let the student's site orientation do "double duty"

Your own template will unfold over the course of at least 3 students

After that, circumstances will always create the need to make adjustments, and each student will progress differently, but you will have your template to guide you

Identification of Traditional Learning Experiences for Social Work Students

The following list is adapted from S. J. Wilson (1981). *Field instruction: Techniques for Supervisors*. NY: Free Press.

1. Read student manual
2. Review agency manual
3. Attend site orientation
4. Review agency website
5. Read case records; discussion of case records with field instructor
6. Read committee meeting minutes, and agency reports/newsletters/webpage.

7. Read and discuss select journal articles, publications and review websites pertaining specifically to the agency/organization or area of practice.
8. Read brief list of essential or highly relevant books
9. Observe the field supervisor or other appropriate agency personnel in interactions with clients, colleagues, and other community organizations. Prepare a summary or assessment of the interaction. Write an assessment of the client.
10. Listen to a tape-recorded interaction or lecture or watch an audio-visual presentation. Prepare a critique for discussion.
11. Attend a meeting (e.g., staff/team, agency committee, agency board, community group). Take notes on the dynamics of the discussion. Provide a written summary of the content.
12. Visit the agency in the evening or on weekends to observe agency activities during these “off-hour” times.
13. Audio-or video-tape an interaction with a client. Review and critique it.
14. Practice interviewing. Interview the field supervisor and take a social history. Discuss the interview process.
15. Sit in the waiting area and observe the atmosphere, behaviors of individuals, and interactions between clients and staff.
16. Drive around the service catchment area, agency neighborhoods. Go into schools, etc.
17. Be responsible for a caseload of clients (number assigned may vary based on responsibilities involved and school requirements). Conduct interviews with clients and provide direct services. Screen & select cases before assigning them to students. When assigning cases to students, the student should not be the primary worker assigned to a case. The primary worker should be an employee. The student should have secondary responsibility, i.e. be a learner who is assisting the primary social worker. The student should not be contacted about the case once the practicum is over. (Confidentiality issues, subpoenas) Be mindful of reimbursement issues, counter-signing, licensing law, etc.
18. Develop a case consultation outline in preparation for supervision conferences.
19. Develop a case analysis outline (perhaps based upon the FPC practice behaviors.)
20. Case documentation through practice writing exercises, i.e. court reports, assessments, treatments plans, report writing, etc. that do not become part of the official case record.
21. Discuss or present a concentration year integrative seminar case from the school.

22. Library research (best practices, peer-reviewed research, site related articles, theory)
23. Visit other community agencies and organizations (e.g., referral sources, collaborative partners, related sites.)
24. Identify, study relevant community resources; create or update a resource manual.
25. Attend a court hearing.
26. Attend related professional workshops, seminars, and lectures in the community.
27. Attend in-service staff development programs.
28. Prepare an in-service staff development program.
29. Co-facilitate or lead a group. Participate in pre-planning.
30. Co-facilitate or lead a meeting. Participate in pre-planning.
31. Go out on home visits. Conduct or participate in the interview.
32. Make telephone calls to clients and/or collateral contacts.
33. Take on-call (after hours) responsibilities.
34. Role play with the field supervisor to try out new skills and techniques.
35. Participate in orienting new students or staff to the agency/organization.
36. Keep a daily log of experiences and reactions to them. Use a critical thinking approach in reflecting on the experiences.
37. Engage in structured self-reflection to identify how personal experiences may influence professional practice.
38. Keep a reflective or integrative practicum journal
39. Prepare a process recording of an individual interaction, group session, meeting, or telephone contact.
40. Write a brief topic or case related or integrative paper
41. Participate in a one-way mirror observation as an observer or as a subject.
42. Interview administrators, managers, or other staff to gather specific information about their

roles and perspectives

43. Interview other disciplines at or away from the site to gather specific information about their roles, perspectives and values
44. Online or Audio-Video training resources
45. NASW online course "Understanding the NASW Code of Ethics" www.naswwebed.org
46. Interviewing staff regarding ethical dilemmas they have faced in their careers; ethical issues related to site services
47. Assist in writing or revising the agency's policy and procedures manual.
48. Assist in writing or revising the agency's manual/resource file for student interns.
49. Assist in gathering information for and prepare an annual program or agency budget.
50. Develop, or assist in developing, a grant proposal.
51. Identify new funding opportunities.
52. Assist in writing a newsletter. Prepare a webpage item.
53. Assist with a marketing or public relations project.
54. Participate on an agency committee to plan an event (e.g., fund-raising, educational workshop, community activity).
55. Develop outcome measures for a program or special project.
56. Design and conduct a research project.
57. Participate in a community engagement project (e.g., volunteer initiatives, housing support programs, awareness events, policy education activities)