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Well-crafted assignments early in the field placement are essential even before we understand and assess who our students are and what they can do. As the experience unfolds, students can have greater input into designing their assignments, but it is important to anticipate and prepare a range of activities that will help students get started working with people from a micro-, mezzo-, and macro-system perspective.

MACRO PRACTICE WITH ORGANIZATIONS

Social administration or management of organizations is a domain that provides students with macro experiences around organizational dynamics. The issues that concern social work administrators include internal as well as external management of organizations. Internal management refers to work with program structures and design, employee supervision and leadership development, motivation and control, and resource acquisition. External management pertains to “interactions and exchanges with funding sources, political relationships, bureaucratic requirements, dependencies on suppliers, regulators and cooperating agencies for clients, money and materials”(Fauri, Wernet, & Netting, 2000, p.11). Students are required to keep logs or journals of the administrative activities by recording key events, steps taken, progress, set backs or problems, and reflections on their practice for each week of the placement. These logs are central to field instruction discussions. They serve as a running account of specific activities on assignments, starting with brief statements of goals and objectives, student roles, level of responsibility, and initial and ongoing tasks engaged in each week. Logs should also include students’ impressions and assessment of what they have accomplished in relation to assignment logical next steps, impediments or problems and progress or successes.

Sample Organizational/Administrative Assignments

- Examining the agency’s official mission statement, established goals and objectives, strategies for achieving goals and recommending policy changes if needed; developing alternative or contingency plans to achieve a particular agency objective.

- Defining the tasks and activities of various roles, positions, or programs in the agency, including the development of a job description for newly created agency positions or programs.

- Designing an orientation program for newly hired employees.

- Designing and implementing an in-service training program on a specific topic of concerns to staff or the agency.
- Preparing an analysis of a meeting that the student chaired and evaluating how effective the student was in moving through the agenda and in facilitating communication.
- Supervising staff members or managing an agency unit, department, or program with several employees or volunteers.
- Identifying the criteria necessary for assessment of employee performance and conducting evaluations of staff.
- Evaluating the financial resource needs of an agency in the present or projecting the agency's resource needs and allocations over a 3- to 5-year period.
- Participating in the planning, development, and implementation of fundraising activities.
- Researching and writing proposals for additional agency funding.
- Presenting, interpreting, and justifying an agency or program budget to a board of directors or potential funding source.
- Writing descriptive materials, such as flyers, pamphlets, or brochures, about the agency's services or programs.
- Preparing press releases about agency activities for newspapers or newsletters.

MACRO PRACTICE WITH COMMUNITIES

Interventions aimed at the community level of macro practice usually begin with identifying the target community's physical boundaries, its self-identification, and the community's structure, including demographic characteristics, values, power, economic structure, and the governmental service systems (Landan & Feit, 1999). Pippard and Bjorklund (2003) propose that essential techniques/tools for community practice include understanding the use of influence in group decision making and facilitation of group process. They propose that community practitioners need to understand the techniques of force field analysis (FFA), nominal group technique (NGT), and Q-sort, Delphi, and managerial tools such as Performance Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) charts to be able to assess when to apply these tools differentially. Like agency administration, community organization and planning requires the development of skill in the areas of needs assessment and budgeting as well as an ability to develop "an expertise in group dynamics, conflict resolution, negotiation and political organizing" (Fauri, Wernet, & Netting, 2000, p/ 104). These assignments provide unique opportunities for students to develop policy navigation and client access skills. (Richan, 1989). Community organization generally refers to practice in three distinct areas:

Organizational/group development: for democratic collective action on social and community problems affecting health and well-being; and advocacy for change or creation of laws, policies, and programs to

better meet human needs. Some assignments include providing technical assistance, preparing community needs assessment, constituency development through self-help/mutual support groups, coalition building, and community engagement initiatives.

Planning/program development: for involvement of professionals and service constituents in the coordination of existing services as well as the development of new collaborative or agency programs. Some assignments include resource development, fact-finding, interagency coordination, proposal writing, program evaluation, policy and legislative analysis, and lobbying.

Community education/leadership development: for the acquisition of human and legal rights, self-actualization, self-determination, social cohesion, and enhancing client access and participation. Some assignments include developing information and referral services, educating and training staff, consumers, and volunteers through workshops or conferences, preparing newsletters, speakers, bureaus, and community outreach.

As in other macro assignments, students are required to keep logs or journals of their organizing and planning activities, recording key events, steps taken, progress, set backs or problems, and reflections on their practice for each week of the placement.

Sample Community Organization Assignments

- Use various planning tools (e.g., census data and community directories).
- Distinguish between short- and long-range planning procedures and methods.
- Initiate a planning process that includes the participation of appropriate groups (e.g., citizen groups, boards, target groups).
- Forecast potential developments for a series of planning objectives.
- Prepare a time schedule for a comprehensive community-based planning process.
- Form a problem-solving task group from diverse agencies or consumer interest groups.
- Serve as participant on a task force.
- Identify potential areas of group conflict among committee members.
- Initiate contact with a group or organization for purposes of mutual cooperation.
- Develop and implement an agreement to coordinate services with another agency.
- Prepare documents and proposals for negotiation sessions with funding sources.
- Participate in lobbying efforts on local and state levels.
- Organize a speaker's bureau.

MACRO PRACTICE POLICY ANALYSIS

Throughout its history, the social work profession has been in the forefront of social and political change. Intrinsic to these efforts has been the ability of social workers to understand and interpret social policies and, in turn, to influence the development of such policies. Social work education programs often remind students that social policies shape social work practice. Policy analysis requires a range of activities such as: recognizing how a social condition comes to be viewed as a social problem; collection and analysis of data measuring the extent and consequences of a social problem; identification and analysis of prior policy efforts aimed at solving a social problem; identification, analysis and assessment of alternative policy options; and development and presentation of policy recommendations before legislative or community groups. These activities form the basis for possible student assignments in this arena.

Sample Policy Analysis Assignments

- Conduct interviews with key stakeholders to gather and compare alternative perspectives on the extent and consequences of a social problem.
- Complete a stakeholder analysis that identifies key individuals and organizations, their interests in the problem and specific solutions, and their bases of legitimacy and power.
- Research the legislative history of an existing or proposed program.
- Complete a cost-benefit analysis comparing two or more policy alternatives.
- Critically review a policy or program proposal to identify potential implementation challenges and to generate possible solutions.
- Identify and contact groups and individuals to solicit support for a policy reform.
- Contact legislative or bureaucratic decision makers to explain/advocate for a policy.
- Organize and facilitate advocacy efforts.
- Present policy analysis and recommendations at a community meeting.
- Prepare and present public testimony in support of a policy or program reform for legislative or budgetary hearings or board meetings.
- Prepare and present testimony in support of a policy or program reform.
- Track and critically analyze the progress of a legislative or administrative reform.

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORK AND POLICY ADVOCACY

Wolk, Pray, and Weismiller (1996) define political social work and policy advocacy in field work in the following ways:

Governmental relations: involves citizens and groups in activities to influence the formal decision-making process of governmental officials. Placements in this arena would be staffing the office of an elected official or staffing a constituency service or government commission, or being assigned to a lobbying office or group.

Electoral policies: involves being assigned to work in the formal or informal systems that compete for power in government and might entail working for a ballot initiative or referendum, staffing a candidate's campaign or a political action committee.

Policy advocacy, development, and implementation: might involve work in legislative or executive branch research offices, and work within professional organizations or advocacy groups. These placements offer exposure to policy-making and provide experience on which to develop necessary skills. The following questions are provided to guide the choice of assignments in this arena.

How does the assignment aid the student's ability to establish rapport and build relationships with colleagues and community leaders; develop use of initiative and leadership skills; demonstrate understanding of group processes, collaboration, coalition building, and conflict resolution; use organizational strategies and tactics; demonstrate professional communication and self-awareness; and function on a responsible and increasingly independent level?

How does this assignment aid the student's understanding of the agency's goals and objectives toward meeting client system needs; the nature of the problem; the administrative demands and operating policies?

How does this assignment aid the student's ability to understand the intent of the policy and its origin; assess the process used to develop the policy or changes to the policy; assess the political and administrative feasibility of policy alternatives; prepare written policy documents that are responsive to the population or issue; work with constituency and stakeholders to integrate policy into practice; and evaluate and monitor outcomes?

Sample Political Social Work Assignments

- Participate in voter-registration drives.
- Research a legislative issue; write a legislative brief on the issue, and participate in or initiate meetings regarding this issue.
- Prepare material for presentation to inform others on an issue.
- Observe and partner with a legislative lobbyist.

- Track local, state, or federal legislation regarding an issue pertinent to the problems of the community.

PRACTICE RESEARCH

Research assignments are appropriate within each practice method described, and designing such assignments emphasizes the significance of practice research in all aspects of social work practice.

Sample community organization research assignments: Design and test a questionnaire that will help tap into the opinions of a select constituency or determine the feasibility for a particular agency program (day care center) or community project (reclaiming a park).

Sample policy analysis research assignment: Track the legislative response to a social problem at the city, state, and national levels. Locate and analyze survey data on the prevalence of a specific social or health problem, the populations affected, and the scope of the problem for a specific zone or area. Students could also conduct surveys of their own to evaluate staff or community support or opposition to program reform, elimination, or expansion.

Sample organizational research assignment: Organize a series of focus groups composed of a diverse staff to evaluate the level of cultural competence that exists in the agency and to ascertain what diversity training needs to be instituted.