

## Field Practicum Contract Development

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.