



ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL FIELD SUPERVISION & USING THE SUPERVISION AGENDA

The objective of professional training is not only to teach the knowledge, skills and abilities that enable the MSW student to do a competent job but also to socialize the student to the ways of the profession, and to develop a professional conscience as informed by the *NASW Code of Ethics*. During field education, students should begin to learn how to internalize self-discipline and accountability as these relates to developing a professionalized self. MSW students and field instructors engage in supervision to accomplish this. It is important to use supervision in a one-to-one meeting effectively by preparing an agenda that covers the recommended areas for discussion (see below). The ideal supervisory dyad: “Secure student and autonomous field instructor.”

TYPES OF SUPERVISION

Administrative Supervision: Students are members of the fieldwork setting which has a system of regulations and procedures, universally and impersonally applied which determine the rights and duties of people occupying each of the positions in the fieldwork setting. It is the student’s responsibility to gather information about the organization and to meet the people who work in the organization particularly during orientation (read manuals, policies, procedures etc). Students need to know their rights, duties, and the expectations of the fieldwork site (dress code, schedules, etc.) and if they don’t know, they need to ask! In general, students are expected to do recordings, data entry, (statistics etc.), record keeping, or any other administrative duties that are required by the fieldwork site to document the work they have completed. Administrative supervision also includes reviewing the student’s performance during supervisory meetings and during the evaluation process at the end of the term.

Educational Supervision: This is where the “teaching/learning” aspect of the supervisory exchange occurs and is based on the objectives of the Educational Agreement. Students, in conjunction with their field instructor, develop learning experiences based on the opportunities available in the fieldwork site. Basic skills, classroom integration, reflection on privilege, oppression, diversity and social justice (PODS), and the development of a professional identity should be the focus.

Students should be prepared to discuss their areas of strength as well as areas for growth. Each MSW student and field instructor should engage in a midterm evaluation to help identify progress and/or areas for further growth and development. The Educational Agreement can help guide this discussion. Students should approach their field placement with a flexible attitude and be open to learning and receiving constructive feedback.

Shadowing is another form of educational supervision. This includes attending rounds with the field instructor or other staff, observing the field instructor conduct interviews, lead groups, participates in committee meetings, or engage in exchanges with staff. Many “teachable moments” occur “on the spot” and can be initiated by the field instructor or the student. MSW students need to practice asking questions and asking them often!

Students should make a point to be actively involved in their learning process. They should know their learning style. Ask yourself: Do I need to be constantly reminded of tasks? Do I work better on my own or not? Do I like to observe or learn from demonstrations? What motivates me to learn? Am I a self-starter or do I need a lot of direction and support? What gets in the way of my learning? Students need to learn how to concentrate on devoting most of their energies to the *learning situation*.

Supportive/Reflective Supervision: In this type of supervision, the focus is on helping the MSW student deal with placement-related stress and in developing attitudes and feelings conducive to maximizing learning and performance. Students and field instructors live and work in stressful environments.

Sometimes a source of stress in field placement comes from a combination of the demands of administrative supervision, the learning demands of educational supervision, and the nature and context of the social work tasks at hand. The field instructor should provide a supportive learning environment which allows the student to manage the simultaneous demands of the field placement, school-related work, and overall life issues. The relationship that is developed between the field instructor and the student is critical to all aspects of learning and supervision.

Integrative and reflective supervision should also have a focus on developing professional behaviors in students. This includes establishing a trusting relationship where the student and field instructor engage in, follow through on, and foster a reflective process that sustains professional growth and development throughout the placement. Incorporating social justice issues into mentoring and supervisory sessions allows students and field instructors alike to recognize and intervene with social justice issues in the practice setting. Linkages between the classroom and the fieldwork setting are strengthened when supervisory discussions include a focus on classroom-based assignments that can be parlayed into field-based activities. Making connections across academic courses, field learning, and other life-lessons enriches and integrates the learning experience.

The following professional practice behaviors related to professional development should be incorporated into supervisory discussions. These focus on the student learning to:

- Exhibit professional demeanor and maintain open relationships in the fieldwork setting, the community, the school, and with other professionals.
- Demonstrate personal responsibility, accountability, the ability to collaborate and follow through on commitments.
- Actively listen, communicate (verbally and written) in a timely, responsible, and sensitive manner, and exhibit self-awareness and self-correction.
- Maintain appropriate professional behaviors (attendance, time management, meeting deadlines, appearance, demeanor, etc.).

THE SUPERVISION PROCESS

Supervision Meetings: The student sets up a weekly one-hour supervision meeting with their field instructor and establishes a Supervision Agenda using the template below. Students must receive one hour of supervision per week. The following categories should be included on the Supervision Agenda:

1. Administrative issues.
2. Progress related to fieldwork site assignments and developing proficiency on the corresponding competencies and practice behaviors.
3. Reflection on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity, and Social Justice issues (PODS).
4. Reflection on personal and professional growth, skill development and the identification and development of Key Learning Experience/Project Summaries.

If there is a secondary LMSW field instructor, the student must **also** meet with them for an hour per week utilizing this agenda format.

Remember, the use of a Supervision Agenda may indeed be the *key* to successful supervision by virtue of the power it holds in being able to structure discussions, document successes and concerns, and encourage difficult conversations.