



Readiness for Field: What Do Field Instructors Think?

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Faculty members at the undergraduate social work department at Johnson C. Smith University were concerned about the readiness of their students for field placements. Students are assigned to a block placement in the spring semester of their senior year. Internships are in a variety of agencies such as schools, child welfare services, mental health and substance abuse programs, and health clinics. Field instructors from these internships were surveyed using the Readiness Skill Survey, adapted for social work from a study of law students' readiness for externship and clinical experience (Young & Blanco, 2007).

Fifteen field instructors from a variety of agencies responded to the survey. Thirteen had supervised for the Johnson C. Smith BSW program for up to 4 years, one for 9-12 years and one for 13 or more years; thirteen had also supervised for another university. All field instructors but one had a graduate degree.

The field instructors were given a list of readiness skills and behaviors expected for entering social work students, such as oral communication and professionalism. They were asked to rank those skills and behaviors in which they perceived entering students needed most preparation. In order of importance, those skills and behaviors were:

- Oral communication: ability to express self effectively; ability to communicate with clients, peers, administrators, and other service providers; ability to appropriately articulate social work jargon;
- Written communication: following the basic rules of grammar and sentence structure; attention to detail; ability to utilize professional social work jargon appropriately in documents; ability to use technology appropriately;
- Beginning generalist social work skills: ability to utilize the helping process in identifying an appropriate plan of action for a client; [application] of classroom knowledge to practice; ability to practice [in a way that] respects human difference and diversity;
- Professionalism: emotional maturity; self-reliance; punctuality and observation of deadlines;

[positive] attitude and response to supervision and criticism; adherence to basic principles [and ethics] of social work practice; identification with social work as a profession;

- Workplace skills: professional dress; ability to adapt to office routine and format; politeness to staff, clients and public.

This study will be followed by a survey of social work students about their feelings of readiness for field. The findings of both studies will inform the restructuring of the training program to prepare students for their practicum experience. A writing center will be established exclusively for BSW students, and writing-intensive assignments will be included in all classes. A seminar will be offered to seniors one semester prior to their internships; the seminar will reinforce the application of generalist social work skills in practice and will address professionalism and workplace skills.

References

Young, C. & Blanco, B. (2007). What students don't know will hurt them: A frank view from the field on how to better prepare our clinic and externship students. *Clinical Law Review*, 14, 105-139.