



A Tribute to Jo Ann McFall

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[Editor's Note: In July 2015 Jo Ann McFall completed her term as Chair of the Council on Social Work Education's Council on Field Education and simultaneously retired from 23 years at the School of Social Work at Michigan State University. Jo Ann is the 2015 recipient of NANFED's [Dean Schneck Memorial Award for Distinction in Social Work Field Education](#). Field Educator invited Lisa Richardson to pay tribute to Jo Ann's contributions as a leader in field education.]

I still remember the first time I was in a meeting with Jo Ann McFall. It was in Philadelphia, at the 2008 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting, when I was just slightly over a year into my position as MSW Field Director. Like many social work field directors, I came from direct practice into the role. Probably also like many, I spent most of the first year discovering what I *didn't know* about field education. The early morning meeting was for Consortium Chairs of the North American Network of Field Educators and Directors (NANFED). Like so many other occasions in that first year, it was accelerating my sense of what I did not know. But I was struck by Jo Ann's contributions: insightful, direct, pragmatic, and credible. I was relieved to identify someone who I could reach out to as a mentor.

A couple of years later I found myself at the table with Jo Ann again, this time as appointees to the CSWE Council on Field Education (COFE). Jo Ann's capacity for diplomacy, her long view of field education, and her reasoned approach to problem solving led the COFE members to enthusiastically endorse her for COFE chair. Who better suited to take the helm and lead us, and lead social work field education nationally, than Jo Ann?



I share these personal impressions because they reflect what field educators around the country have said when speaking of Jo Ann. In July, when Jo Ann posted on the Field Directors List Serve that she was completing her term as COFE chair, the email list bubbled with responses. Jo Ann was described as a skillful leader, dedicated to field education. She was recognized for her many contributions,

including navigating initiatives such as the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS), the 2014 Field Summit, and the COFE-sponsored field directors' survey. In the words of one colleague, COFE "catapulted forward" under her leadership. In the words of another, Jo Ann's effort "has made the rest of our jobs easier and has helped elevate field to its deserved status." As we have entered into this era of field as the "signature pedagogy," Jo Ann has been an effective advocate, able to represent the strategic interests of field education to a larger audience.

As Jo Ann's term on COFE ends, so ends an impressive tenure at Michigan State University (MSU). Jo Ann served as the Associate Director for Field Education for 19 years. MSU's social work field department covers over 300 BSW and MSW field placements in urban, suburban, and rural settings across the state through both campus-based and distance learning programs. As Jo Ann approached this year's retirement, her role was recalibrated with an emphasis on community engagement – something every school should be considering as a natural extension of the relationships built through field education.

Jo Ann's embodiment of the field director role serves as an exemplar for all of us. The complex skills required to fulfill the role of field director have been more explicitly recognized in recent years. But the arc of Jo Ann's career demonstrates the potential for this constellation of skills to impact students and colleagues, pedagogy and scholarship, both within and beyond one's own institution. Betsy Voshel, Director of Field Instruction at the University of Michigan, described Jo Ann's approach to student learning as balancing support for student performance with regard for the clients they serve. Betsy reports she learned from Jo Ann "to set my expectations high and then find ways to assist students to achieve, and to do this in a professional manner with compassion and respect." Jo Ann served on her school's leadership team, establishing the centrality of field with her academic colleagues. Rena Harold, Associate Director of the MSU School of Social Work, notes "her innovations expanded how and where students could be placed, enhanced the field liaison model to cement a strong relationship between the School of Social Work itself and the field setting, [and] employed field seminar groups to improve student learning."

Beyond MSU, Jo Ann has impacted field education regionally and nationally. She was an early organizer and leader of the North Central Field Director's Consortium, one of the largest field consortiums in the country. She has mentored countless colleagues in local, regional and national forums. Jo Ann's collaborative style of leadership is widely recognized. "She is able to gather allies, encourage dialogue and make difficult decisions," notes Betsy Voshel. Julie Navarre, MSU Director of Field Education, describes Jo Ann as "open to collaboration and [...] willing to be in situations outside her comfort zone." Jo Ann is facilitative, synthesizing diverse views while remaining attuned to the group. As described by Rena Harold, Jo Ann has a "great ability for team work" and her enthusiastic, energetic approach "helps those around her achieve more than they would have thought possible."

These characteristics (problem solver, balancer, diplomat, mentor, synthesizer, consolidator, recruiter, advocate, champion etc.) embody the field director role across settings and constituents. In addition, Jo Ann's extensive and longstanding field education scholarship must be recognized, which has served as a model of the reflexive practitioner/educator/scholar. Jo Ann has delivered over 30 peer-reviewed presentations in regional, national, and international settings. She has co-authored 9 published articles, including the latest, "Using Field Evaluation Data for Continuous Quality Improvement: A Policy Competency Example," which was recognized with the [2014 Excellence in Field Scholarship Prize](#) sponsored by *Field Educator*. Jo Ann is not afraid to venture into un-charted waters or challenging landscapes, as evidenced by her early work on distance field education, her role as moderator to a recent *Field Educator* article on employment-based placements, and her work on assessment. Both her ongoing scholarship and her interest in exploring new terrain (which evokes the recently removed competency on responding to contexts) serve as enduring models to social work educators.

Marion Bogo, Professor of Social Work in the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, summarized Jo Ann's combination of attributes and outcomes in this way: "field education needs committed and versatile leaders such as Jo Ann – able to administer the complicated dimensions of field, knowledgeable of and contributing to the empirical base for field education, and contributing to national deliberations."

When asked what she hopes to see in the field following her retirement, Jo Ann said "Through creative and contextually based implementation of EPAS 2015, the Field Summit and beyond, our next steps must include: securing the required resources for our many unique field programs to fully operationalize their mission; instituting the field director in a leadership role in every school; and building upon the current models to create accessible, appropriate, and meaningful learning experiences for each student." Jo Ann, demonstrating her capacity for finding harmony in a vision that is student-centered, believes in possibility, expects accountability, and assumes committed and engaged leadership. Refocusing on the core purpose of all of our endeavors, Jo Ann concluded, "let's imagine how many lives have been enriched through the services of our students and their students and their students." Indeed, this rippling effect captures Jo Ann's own legacy, teaching us through a career of leadership, mentorship, and active inquiry.

Jo Ann has continued to embrace "lifelong learning." She and her husband Jim have embarked on a multi-year sailing expedition, known as the "[Great Loop](#)," on their 35-foot boat *Namaste*. You can follow her 6,000-mile sailing trip at <http://wavefromnamaste.com>.