The Devil is in the Details: A Content Analysis of Field Manuals

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Abstract

The study is a content analysis of twenty undergraduate field education manuals from one northeast state using NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software. The authors examined how the manuals' content supports program transparency in gatekeeping into the profession and the roles of faculty field liaisons and agency field supervisors. In the transition to the 2015 Council on Social Work Education Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE EPAS), the authors also examined the incorporation of the EPAS competencies. The manuals showed some consistency but also variation of content and detail.

Introduction

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) sets forth the educational standards for accreditation to which programs must conform, but these same educational standards allow for interpretation and independence in how they are applied. Programs seek support and guidance from the literature, from colleagues in established social work programs and from their college mission statements when designing and updating their programs. In 2008, field education was specifically recognized by CSWE as social work education's signature pedagogy and provided specific standards for accredited social work programs (CSWE, 2008; Holden, Barker, Rosenberg, Kuppens, & Ferrell, 2011; Meyer-Adams, Potts, Koob, Dorsey, & Rosales, 2011). Field continues to be identified as the signature pedagogy in the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS).

While CSWE EPAS provides standards for field education expectations, how the standards are implemented is left to the programs. Field education manuals (hereafter referred to as manuals) are one way in which programs establish accessible and transparent expectations. Manuals are used not only to document social work programs' policies and procedures, but also to set expectations of students, agency field supervisors (a.k.a. field educators, field instructors), faculty liaisons (faculty, adjuncts, staff, etc.) and field offices/personnel. Ideally, the manual is a repository of information that guides field education, establishes clear standards for those involved in field, incorporates CSWE standards,

sets forth the program's mission and reflects current research. This ideal is supported both within social work as well as other helping professions. One group of social work researchers identified key elements of practice manuals which include: purpose and rationale of the document, goals, core content, how manuals should be used and how outcomes will be measured (Galinsky, Fraser, Day, & Richman, 2013). Manuals are also used in related fields such as nursing to guide and measure competencies in their clinical practice (Buus, Cassedy, & Gonge, 2013).

The standards set forth by CSWE EPAS are intentionally written to allow programs to have some level of flexibility in how standards are implemented. The authors looked to the literature for previous research on the content and/or application of manuals and found none. Within the greater body of field literature references are made to policies, field manuals, and the variety of roles associated with field education, but a comprehensive discussion of manual content is lacking. Further, social work education email or 'listservs' are often the place where members of the field education community can collaborate, ask questions and provide summative responses related to policies and content of manuals. Because of the gap in the literature and the ongoing discussion related to field policies and procedures, the authors--both BSW field coordinators--believed that there was something to be learned from examining BSW manuals for their content. This research is particularly timely in the transition between the 2008 and 2015 EPAS. The research was guided by two questions: 1) What do field manuals contain? and 2) Is there consistency across manuals with respect to areas central to CSWE EPAS and field education research?

Literature Review

The research focuses on four areas central to research in social work field education, as well as to the CSWE EPAS. The authors will briefly review the literature in the areas of gatekeeping, the role of the faculty liaison, field supervision and the incorporation of EPAS competencies.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is a continuous process, with field education often being a critical point for evaluating students' appropriateness for the profession (Miller & Koerin, 2002; Sowbel, 2012). CSWE accreditation standards require programs to make expectations accessible to students and clearly articulate policies that involve admission of BSW students to senior field placement (EPAS 3.2, 2008; EPAS 4.0.1, 2015); continuous assessment of students' performance (EPAS 4.0, 2008; EPAS 3.1.8, 2015) and finally termination from field placement (EPAS 3.2.8, 2008; EPAS 3.1.8, 2015) (CSWE, 2008, 2015).

Prior to entering into field, BSW students are required to apply for admission into a social work program, to maintain a specific grade point average (GPA), and at times to meet specific criteria set by each program. While some problems are revealed in the classroom and through coursework (i.e., absenteeism, late assignments, substandard academic performance and disruptive behavior), some challenges only appear when students enter field (Raymond & Sowbel, 2015). Further, "there is a

general assumption among social work educators that the primary locus for termination of students will be in the field internships" (Sowbel, 2012, p. 29).

The importance of gatekeeping is clearly articulated in the literature, but the relationship between gatekeeping and a program's manual is not. The authors assert that a well-developed manual can support a program in its concerns of litigation by a student (Miller & Koerin, 2002; Sowbel, 2012); establish suitability criteria (getting and staying in program) (Sowbel, 2012; Wayne, 2004); address CSWE EPAS concerns for establishing valid measures or protocols for evaluating students (Sowbel, 2012, Wayne, 2004); and establish clear documentation/policies to deal with unsatisfactory student performance, also known as due process (Wayne, 2004).

Faculty Liaison
Faculty liaisons provide the linkage between the program and the agency field setting and field supervisor, as well as connecting classroom knowledge to practice (Moen, Liley, & Dennis, 2015). Armenta and Linseisen (2015) contend that faculty liaisons serve "as the bridge between agency field placements and classroom instruction" (p. 1). CSWE EPAS 2008 had expectations that faculty liaisons will have "contacts with field education settings, and evaluating student learning and field setting effectiveness congruent with the program's competencies" (CSWE, 2008, p. 9). However, CSWE 2015 makes no reference to faculty liaisons and their roles (CSWE, 2015). While the role and importance of the faculty liaison in the literature is clear, CSWE EPAS places the responsibility on the Director of Field Education and the program to ensure that faculty liaisons meet the expectations (developed by the program) of contacts with students, field agencies and application of program competencies in that setting (EPAS 2.1.5) (CSWE, 2008).

While not specifically identified, the wording of CSWE EPAS 2008 sets the expectation that the faculty liaison has some level of faculty status, i.e. tenured, tenure-track, professional faculty, and/or adjunct. Conversely, EPAS 2015 has no such expectations (CSWE, 2015). Because of limited resources allocated to field education, schools of social work often rely on adjuncts as faculty liaisons; this can lead to communication barriers between program faculty and faculty liaisons in the area of curriculum development (Burke, Condon, & Wickell, 1999). The problem associated with a social work program's reliance on adjunct faculty as faculty liaisons was best summarized by Dalton, Stevens, and Maas-Brady (2011) who stated, "[…] adjunct faculty by its very nature have a temporal and less visible presence within schools of social work" (p.10). The tangential relationship of adjunct faculty can not only affect the quality and consistency of their work with students but also diminishes opportunities to provide feedback to the program regarding curriculum and policies development (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010).

The literature on faculty liaisons' roles and how they relate to use of field manuals, or are represented in field manuals, is scant. The need to explore how programs interpret this 2008 accreditation

standard and workload expectations is important and speaks to a need identified in a survey by Dalton et al. (2011). These authors found that the release time to administer field education was a tall order, and generated a recommendation that "CSWE must mandate/specify an appropriate level of support for field if it is to be the signature pedagogy" (p. 8) in order to meet these responsibilities.

Field Supervisors
Field supervisors in social work internships are professional social workers who are (typically) employed at field placement agencies, accept a student for a minimum number of hours (400 for BSW students) and provide supervision and additional training for that student. Field education as a standard is rooted in the social work tradition of the apprentice model for supervision and training. It embraces the philosophy that social work supervisors are role models: the expectation of the student is to emulate the supervisor's professional skills and values (Barretti, 2007, 2009; Cross-Denny, Heyman, Sealy, Marlowe, & Cretella, 2013). The inspiration of field supervisors as role models adds vigor to the learning transfer between the classroom and the field (Barretti, 2009). While supervision of the student by the field supervisor is expected, number of hours and frequency of supervision are not specified in EPAS (CSWE, 2008, 2015). The only guidance offered is linked to field placements where a student is employed. This lack of clarity leads programs to develop their own requirements.

The importance of field supervisor training has been highlighted in the literature, as well as discussions on how to best prepare field supervisors for their role with students (Birkenmaier, Wilson, Berg-Weger, Banks and Hartung, 2003; Knight, 2015). Gatekeeping, mentioned above, is a crucial area for supervisor training. Sowbel (2012) explored the issues of field supervisors as gatekeepers and the quandaries that they face in resolving their dilemma between their educator roles and their clinical roles. How field supervisors prioritize this in their assessment and work with students can influence student overall performance evaluation and quality of supervision surrounding student satisfaction (Fortune, Lee, & Cavazos, 2007; Knight, 2000; Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, & Huggins, 2010). The lack of conformity in field supervisors' evaluation skills is explained by their not having a "shared view of how to best impart knowledge" (Wayne et al., 2010, p. 331). How programs educate field supervisors is open to interpretation; there is variability of training offered to field supervisors (Knight, 2015). The importance of this orientation, training and ongoing communication by faculty liaisons is critical in developing rich learning environments for students and a knowledge base in field supervisors.

Incorporation of EPAS Competencies
CSWE sets forth the EPAS every seven years "establishing thresholds for professional competence" (CSWE, 2015, p. 5). As mentioned earlier, the EPAS 2008 elevated field education to be the signature pedagogy. It was given distinction as the primary method of instruction to teach and socialize students in the role of the professional. It also underscored the expectation that field education

was as important as the explicit curriculum of the classroom (Holden et al., 2011). Additionally, the EPAS set a standard for social work programs that requires them to have program assessments that measure student performance linked to mastering the ten core competencies as demonstrated in field education (CSWE, 2008, 2015). However, the EPAS does not incorporate how programs are to evaluate students' mastery of the competencies via their field performance (Holden et al., 2011; Wayne et al., 2010). The only requirement is that there is an assessment plan for student outcomes that includes at least two measures for each competency (CSWE, 2015).

There are several studies that explore how programs could implement the EPAS 2008 and its mandate to evaluate how programs teach and measure practice competency of social work students (Bogo, Regehr, Katz, Mylopoulos et al., 2011; Bogo, Regehr, Katz, Logie, & Mylopoulos, 2011; Wayne et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2010). These all end with similar recommendations for further validation of measures and no universal agreement as to a standard for evaluation.

The Field Manual
In general, the literature supports the need for transparency in field education for both students and field supervisors but does not speak to the use of a field education manual as a mechanism to achieve this. For the purpose of this study, the literature did not provide any guidance on the structure or application of a manual. Through the analysis of manuals, especially in the four salient areas mentioned above, the authors sought to identify content linked to roles and responsibilities of those connected with field, such as the program specific to gatekeeping, and EPAS, as well as faculty liaisons and field supervisors.

Methods

The authors, a coordinator of field from Siena College and director of field from Marist College, conducted a content analysis study using data from twenty (20) undergraduate (BSW) social work field education manuals from New York State. A content analysis was chosen to review existing materials related to social work field education, to examine content and themes in the manuals, and identify both commonalities and inconsistencies among manuals. This research method allows for the use of both inductive and deductive analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014). The goal of this research was to provide a baseline for field manual content, as well as develop a framework/outline for a best practice field manual.

The first step in obtaining manuals was to search the websites for all undergraduate social work programs in the state (N=32). From this search, conducted in April 2013, 16 field manuals were downloaded. The program directors or field coordinators for the remaining social work programs in the state were contacted via email requesting a copy of their field manuals. The request was emailed twice, with four weeks in between, concluding at the end of May 2013 with four additional manuals provided. A total of 20 field manuals were obtained, representing 62% of the potential sample.

All manuals were either in MS Word, PDF, or HTML format. PDF and HTML files were transformed into MS Word documents, and uploaded into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software. Because of the formatted nature of manuals, much of the content fell readily into expected broad categories such as gatekeeping, responsibilities of faculty liaisons, and expectations of field supervisors. Once broad categories were created, further refinement allowed for a more inductive approach (Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 2006). The authors both work as field coordinators, providing a strong knowledge base to draw from for this research. During the coding process, the authors discussed themes and reviewed titles and content of codes for agreement. Any disagreements in coding, content, and/or code titles were discussed until consensus was achieved. The results were then analyzed overall, and compared with literature related to field education as well as EPAS.

Describing demographics specific to the social work programs in the sample is difficult because information on program size, as well as number of faculty and staff, is not readily available online. What can be discussed with greater ease are the demographics of the institutions where these programs reside. Using the Carnegie Classifications as a guide, 14 of the field education manuals came from private-nonprofit schools, and six came from public institutions. The population at the colleges/universities ranged from 686 to 43,404, with one school identified as very small, four classified as small, nine as medium, and six as large. One college solely offered undergraduate degrees, 14 were identified as granting master's degrees, and five were classified as research universities.

Results

Gatekeeping

Within the manuals, topics of gatekeeping were linked to five different areas: admission to field, grievance procedures, ongoing monitoring, termination and field difficulties (Table 1). These areas align with EPAS expectations (3.1.8, 3.2, 3.2.8, 4.0., 4.0.1) (CSWE, 2008).

Table 1

Gatekeeping

Admissions to field	Grievance Procedure	Termination	Ongoing monitoring	Field Difficulties
11	15	7	14	20

Overall, 11 schools had some reference to admissions to field, which was then broken down into five sub-categories: course prerequisites, GPA, formally admitted BSW program, personal characteristics and other (Table 2). Of the manuals that had information related to admissions to field, all of them

(11) discussed course prerequisites. All but one of the manuals (10) specified GPA requirements/expectations. Four of the 11 manuals included language about students having to be formally admitted to the program before entering field. Just under half (5) of the manuals outlined the personal characteristics of a future social worker. These characteristics tended to be more general such as, "consistently demonstrated a commitment to professional social work standards of behavior" and "students must possess personal attributes that will enable them to work in a mature, responsible and constructive manner with agency personnel and clients." Three schools had an "other" category, which included guidance for how to deal with students on academic probation, dealing with an unsuccessful placement interview and applying for a special placement option.

Table 2

Gatekeeping – Admissions to field

Course Prerequisites	GPA	Formally admitted to BSW program	Personal Characteristics	Other
11	10	4	5	3

The grievance procedures code had a wide range in detail provided. Of the 15 manuals that had information related to this code, ten included very detailed information such as actions to be taken and potential outcomes of a formal grievance hearing. Two schools had minimal detail, a brief paragraph that said that grievances (appeals) could be heard, but no clear steps on the process or outcomes. Three schools referred students to another program document to obtain the policies and procedures around grievance.

Related to but distinct from grievance procedures is termination. Seven manuals had some level of information related to termination. This ranged from explicit reasons a student could be terminated, such as "violence or threats of violence to oneself or others" and "sexual contact with clients", to a more benign statement discussing how a student may be counseled out of the social work program.

Ongoing monitoring has been identified as an important element of gatekeeping; this was discussed in 14 of the manuals. One program discussed having a formal meeting once a semester to review the performance of every student in the program, others discussed less formalized practices that had the intention of being aware of how students are doing in the program and field and taking appropriate action if/when students are not meeting program expectations.

All 20 manuals included guidance around field difficulties; while this could be linked with ongoing

monitoring, field difficulties were distinct in that they addressed the steps that should be taken if a student and/or field supervisor encountered challenges. Twelve (12) programs had detailed information on what to do if there was a difficulty in field. This could be guidance for students, faculty liaisons and/or field supervisors. Some even had step-by-step instructions on how to problem solve such as:

If a student experiences any kind of difficulty with the field placement, she/he should:
   a.   Discuss the problem in an issue-oriented way with her/his Field Instructor.
   b.   If this does not resolve the issue, discuss the issue and attempt to resolve it at the agency level with the Faculty Liaison's involvement.
   c.   If a satisfactory solution cannot be achieved, the Faculty Liaison will recommend to the Coordinator that the student withdraw or be removed from the agency.

Eight of the manuals had brief descriptions ranging from one sentence, "Keep field faculty liaison informed of problems and/or concerns when they arise," to a more lengthy paragraph. The information provided in the brief descriptions could also be directed toward the student, field instructor and/ or faculty liaison.

Faculty Liaison

Faculty liaisons have multiple roles that vary by program, including monitoring student progress, ensuring student is obtaining supervision and access to clients, and resolving conflicts that may arise between field supervisor and student (Danis, Woody, & Black, 2013). Findings from this research identified ten areas for which faculty liaisons are responsible (Table 3).

Table 3

Faculty liaison

Student Learning	Student Assignments	Site Visits	Seminar	Grading
16	17	17	11	17
Field Difficulties	**Communication**	**Provide Training to Field Supervisors**	**Evaluation – Feedback to Field Office**	**Placement**
19	18	10	11	8

Literature has identified faculty liaisons "as the bridge between agency field placements and classroom instruction" (Armenta & Linseisen, 2015, p. 1), responsible for monitoring the quality of

each student's field experience and serving as program mentors to field supervisors (Wayne et al., 2010). Many of the field manuals bear this out in their policies and expectations. Sixteen (16) of the 20 manuals specified the liaison's role in student learning. For example, a theme found in many of the manuals is that the faculty liaison "carries overall responsibility for helping the student, the field instructor and the agency meet the learning outcomes established for the student's field training experience." This statement demonstrates that the "bridge" does exist as faculty liaisons manage student learning through their multifaceted role. This expectation is also reinforced in the code regarding the faculty liaison's role with student assignments. While the type and nature of these assignments are not part of this discussion, the responsibility of assignment oversight explicitly falls to the faculty liaison in 17 of the manuals.

Site visits are a venue for faculty liaisons to evaluate student learning; 17 of the programs have identified that site visits are expected. The frequency in some cases is very clear ("at least once a semester") but in other cases instructions are more vague ("a field liaison is expected to visit an agency […] when feasible"). One program had a requirement of multiple visits each semester and within the manual had a multi-page description of the site visit and what it would entail, including objectives and specific agenda for each visit.

Grading was linked to the faculty liaison in 17 manuals. The reference could be simple ("assigns the final grade"), or provide a little more detail, including the expectation that the faculty liaison will review students' field evaluations and other assignments and take into consideration the recommendation of the field supervisor.

Ensuring that a student has a good learning experience (EPAS 2.1.5) (CSWE, 2008) can place faculty liaisons in a more active role with the field setting and field supervisor. Difficulties are not uncommon in field, and the faculty liaison's role dealing with field difficulties was identified in almost all (19) of the manuals. Fostering ongoing and open communication was also a role of the faculty liaison in 18 of the manuals. The guidance around the type and frequency of contact tended to be vague, such as "maintain contact", or "field faculty liaisons have responsibility for the relationship between the students enrolled in their integrative seminars and the field educators who supervise them."
Ten (10) manuals assigned faculty liaisons the role of training field supervisors. This could be done formally through seminars, orientations and workshops, or informally, such as, "assist in orienting new agency supervisors to the college's curriculum and field education program" and "assist field supervisors in developing supervisory skills."

With expectations that faculty liaisons have developed some level of firsthand knowledge about assigned agencies and field supervisors, it is not surprising that faculty liaisons would be seen as a resource for the field office. To this end, 11 manuals ask faculty liaisons to provide feedback on the placement specific to student learning, and eight more incorporate faculty liaisons into the placement

process for the incoming seniors.

Overall, 70% of manuals addressed seven or more of the ten identified responsibilities of faculty liaisons. Specifically, three manuals touched on all ten roles for faculty liaisons, one touched on nine, five addressed eight roles, and five included seven. Conversely, one manual only touched on three areas, another manual included four, and one other had five of the ten roles identified in this research. There appeared no pattern to which faculty liaison roles were and were not included in field manuals.

Field Supervisors

Field supervisors are a crucial component in student learning. They provide oversight of students' practice skills and are responsible for ensuring that students have learning opportunities that align with BSW generalist practice roles, and that learning is infused with social work knowledge, values and skills as well as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics (B2.2; B2.1.2) (CSWE, 2008). Given these expectations, it is not surprising that manuals had a high level of detail regarding field supervisors. Areas coded in relation to field supervisors included communication with school, familiarity with BSW/field curriculum, student assessments, student learning, supervision, and field supervisors training (Table 4).

Table 4

Agency Field Supervisors

Communication with school	Familiarity with BSW/Field Curriculum	Student Assessments	Student Learning	Supervision	Field Supervisors Training
17	8	17	17	20	18

Communication was identified as a field supervisor responsibility in 17 manuals. This could be a broad statement such as: "willingness to work collaboratively with field coordinator, faculty, students" or a reminder to reach out to the faculty liaison if there are problems, questions, concerns regarding assignments, student learning or other obstacles. Eight programs have an expectation that field supervisors be familiar with the curriculum of the overall program and of field education.
 The field supervisor's role in the assessment process was identified in 17 manuals, including assisting with the development of learning agreements and completing field evaluations. Student learning is a broader code identified in 17 manuals. This code can include ensuring that there is proper orientation to the agency and that the student is assigned cases and has opportunities to engage in direct practice. Again, the detail of direction varies, with some manuals having step-by-

step guidelines of how many cases a student should have by which week of placement, and others identifying broad expectations, such as, "field instructors are responsible for selecting cases and other learning experiences appropriate to the student's level of development."

In this analysis, the code of supervision focused specifically on frequency and duration, with other aspects included under the role of the supervisor covered in other codes (i.e. student learning and student assessment). While all 20 manuals included some discussion on this topic, 19 manuals were specific that supervision needed to be conducted weekly and be a minimum of one hour long. The one manual that did not specify this only mentioned "regular supervision."

Finally, 18 manuals made mention of some type of training, formal and/or informal, for field supervisors. This could be through a field orientation (n=7), a formal field supervisor training course (n=11), or other trainings offered by the program (n=6). While this analysis does not provide any insights on best practice for training field supervisors, it does show that programs recognize that training and orienting field supervisors to their role is important. These manuals also meet the CSWE EPAS expectations that programs discuss how their field education program provides orientation, field instruction training and continuing dialogue with field education settings and field supervisors (2.2.10) (CSWE, 2015).

Overall for the field supervisors theme, one manual only had information related to one of the six codes. This manual included information about supervision, but it did not include frequency or duration. Two manuals had information only in two of the five categories; one had details on supervision and student learning, the other included supervision and communication with school.

CSWE EPAS 2008 Core Competencies and Practice Behaviors

At the time of this study the EPAS 2008 were in their fourth year, with much literature and online discussion about the relevance of the competencies and practice behaviors, how to implement them, and how to measure student mastery of the competencies through their coursework and field experience. Given the level of discussion, it would not be unreasonable to expect that all manuals would have at least some mention of these standards related to core competencies and practice behaviors; however, that was not the case. For the purpose of this research, core competencies and practice behaviors were identified by where they were present in the manual: within the manual's appendix, embedded within the manual, linked to the learning agreement/contract and/or used as the format for the field evaluation (Table 5).

Table 5

Location of EPAS 2008 Core Competencies

As an appendix in the Manual	Embedded within the Manual	EPAS Learning Agreement/ Contract	EPAS Evaluation
7	12	11	10

Looking at the manuals overall, four of the 20 made no mention of the ten core competencies. One manual only identified them within the body of the manual. Seven manuals had two references – of these one referenced EPAS as an attachment and in the evaluation, one had EPAS in an attachment and embedded within the learning agreement, two had EPAS embedded within the manual and evaluation, and three had EPAS embedded within the manual and within learning agreements. Six manuals referenced the competencies in three areas – three of the six had EPAS as an attachment, four embedded within the manual, five in learning agreements and five in evaluations. Two manuals incorporated the competencies and practice behaviors into all four areas.

Discussion

Shulman (2005) contended that, in order for field education to be called a signature pedagogy, it must strive for uniformity and consistency across the accredited programs. The authors conducted a content analysis of BSW manuals in four areas: gatekeeping, role of faculty liaison, supervision and EPAS competencies. What they found in the manuals were some signs of this moving in the right direction. In general, the manuals touched on major areas of CSWE EPAS 2008 expectations as well as with the recent EPAS 2015 that were implemented in July 2015. However, the authors found broad language and variability in most areas as well. The depth of coverage within the themes varied widely; some had more minimal coverage and therefore were less transparent. Access to content in the manuals also was variable, with some information more readily accessible through the manual's table of contents, or by stand-alone prominent headers, while other information was embedded in descriptions of other topics. There was some commonality and some variability within each of the areas: gatekeeping, role of faculty liaison, supervision and EPAS competencies.

The manual has the potential to explicate a program's gatekeeping process through its expression and adherence to CSWE EPAS. Manuals can provide clarity of expectations which Knight (2000) identified as an important part of the dialogue between students and field faculty because manuals also provide "first time students … a clear sense of direction and purpose" (p. 197). These expectations are critical to gatekeeping. Given the importance of gatekeeping in social work education, one would think this would be an area to cover with some level of detail or, at a minimum, provide a reference to

another document so students are clear about the consequences of not meeting expectations specific to field education. This expectation would align with the EPAS 2008 (3.2) and 2015 (3.1) requirement, however, this was not universally found in this sample. Two areas of gatekeeping were often neglected: admissions were covered in only 55% of the manuals and only 35% included information on termination. Manuals proved not to be a reliable source for policies on admitting, retaining, and terminating students from field placements, and how those processes impact students' standing in their social work program. If manuals are to support programs and help in situations of litigation, transparency is critical and these areas require further attention. In addition, many programs have separate program and field manuals. It is likely that details about the codes linked to gatekeeping such as admissions to field, grievance procedures and termination are detailed in the program, rather than the field manual. However, one could argue that best practices would have all of these topics included in the field manual, even if it were to only direct students to the document that provided more detail (i.e. program manual).

Field manuals showed more consistency with regard to discussion of the role of the faculty liaison. Seventy percent of the manuals specified at least seven of the ten roles of the field liaison indicated in the literature. The codes for these roles were: student learning, student assignments, site visits, seminar, grading, field difficulties, communication, training, feedback to field office and placement. Given the many responsibilities of the field liaison, it will be important for social work education to address the concerns about the academic status of field liaisons and the need for adequate resources for field education (Dalton et al., 2011).

Material on field supervision showed some consistency across manuals. The majority of manuals contained information to guide field supervisors in their work with students. Supervision of students was detailed in 95% of the manuals; expectations around communication in 85% and 90% outlined some level of training. Strengths were noted in all of the six areas of review: communication, student learning, student assessment, training, familiarity with the curriculum and supervision. It was reassuring that the manuals were transparent in their expectations of supervision, consonant with Knight's (2015) suggestion that an hour of weekly supervision "is appropriate and provides maximum benefits to students" (p. 107). The exception was that the expectation that field supervisors are familiar with the curriculum was seen in only eight manuals. This may support the emphasis on the literature on training of supervisors and exposure to the curriculum to help them teach and measure practice competency of social work students.

Most field manuals made reference to EPAS competencies. While making direct mention of the EPAS core competencies and practice is not a requirement of CSWE, it does provide a clear sense of learning expectations and outcomes related to field education and demonstrates that programs have taken time to consider the standards outlined in the EPAS and how the program is demonstrating their implementation. It is of some concern that four manuals made no mention of the ten core competencies.

There is also some confusion about where those competencies can be found. It is expected that most schools will make further efforts to incorporate the EPAS competencies and skills to increase compliance with CSWE standards.

Conclusion

There is lively current debate about whether social work field education can meet signature pedagogy expectations regarding universal replication. We began this research as an exploration of content in BSW field manuals to find out what manuals have to say. What we found was that the devil was in the details. Manuals confirmed their potential as an intrinsic part of social work programs, not only by providing comprehensive information about the expectations related to field but also by demonstrating how programs have linked field concepts and policies to CSWE EPAS. The manner in which the manuals were framed clearly afforded programs the opportunity to transition from 2008 to 2015 standards, promoting field education as the signature pedagogy. However, there was marked variability among the manuals in several areas, especially that of gatekeeping. Some manuals provided extensive discussion of gatekeeping, faculty liaison roles, field supervision and EPAS competencies. In other manuals, explication was minimal, or information was hard to find. Social work educators need to consider ways to provide clear communication of a best practice outline for field manuals, while respecting programs' individuality.

One issue raised by the research is that of methods of communication. One question is, "How do you include all the essential information without creating information overload or being too brief?" A limitation of this content analysis was the problem of access to updated manuals. For manuals taken from web pages, data used was what was available online, which potentially contained dated material and/or was missing supporting documents that were referenced in the manual (such as evaluations and learning agreements). Field educators are giving careful consideration to the multiple ways that information can be communicated to field supervisors, faculty liaisons and students (Massaro & Stebbins, 2015).

In looking at the limitations of this study, data collection was a single snapshot in time, collected in spring 2013, of BSW manuals from New York State. Further studies of field manuals could include manuals from other schools and from MSW programs. Future research can examine manual content as it relates to student learning, such as assessments used to monitor students' progress toward mastery of the core competencies. Further information could be gathered about how programs are using manuals to strengthen the link between classroom knowledge and field experience, or to prepare students for their field experience. Future research could also explore new implementations of the manual, like attracting potential social work students and socializing them to the profession. Corvo, Selmi and Montemaro (2003) suggest that it is particularly important for incoming BSW students to be inspired by "a genuine interest in social work" (p. 89).

In summary, this content analysis of BSW field manuals indicated that, in general, these programs were moving toward uniformity in providing information about gatekeeping, faculty liaison roles, field supervision and incorporation of EPAS competencies. However, the devil was in the details: there were marked inconsistencies, especially around gatekeeping. Field manuals have many important functions in communicating policies and standards and can be instrumental in attracting students to social work. Only future exploration will say whether field manuals can, and should, meet signature pedagogy expectations regarding universal replication.

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