



Award-Winning Field Instructors

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Joseph Scalise and Tammy Muskat are the 2010 winners of the North American Network of Field Educators and Directors (NANFED) Heart of Social Work Award. This annual award recognizes excellence in field instruction.

Joseph Scalise, MSW, has forty years of experience with the Family Court Division of the Twenty-Second Judicial Circuit of Missouri as a Deputy Juvenile Officer and Supervisor of Chief Deputy Juvenile Officers. He has been the recipient of notable awards, such as the Missouri Juvenile Justice Association Program of Excellence Award and the Distinguished Service Award of the Missouri district office of the United States Attorney. Mr. Scalise has been a field instructor for over fifteen years for students of St. Louis University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, and the George Warren Brown School of Social Work. He developed an educational partnership with the City of St. Louis Police Department, the St. Louis Public Schools and community agencies to allow interns to work with at-risk youth. He developed and mentored a unit of field instructors in his division. He collaborated with the St. Louis University Criminology Department to create a co-op research project for student development. He serves as an advisor on the Brown School curriculum committee for children, youth and families. He has been a guest lecturer at many local universities and teaches a foundation-level integrative seminar at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work.

Tammy Muskat, MEd, MSW, is the Professional Practice Leader, Social Work at North York General Hospital in Toronto, CA. The internship at the hospital has been classified a Teaching Centre by the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. Ms. Muskat also holds an Adjunct Lecturer appointment at the University of Toronto as Educational Coordinator for social work field instruction at the hospital. Among Ms. Muskat's awards are the TD Bank Financial Group Award through the North York General Hospital Foundation, and the Bertha Rosenstadt Award through the University of Toronto. Ms. Muskat's work in promoting field education is exemplary. For many years, Ms. Muskat has supervised social work students and other field instructors and facilitated student workshops and seminars. As part of her Inter-professional Education (IPE) activities, she developed collaborative placements between the Social Work and Nursing departments. Ms. Muskat has also participated in numerous research projects at the North York General Hospital, including an analysis of the application process of patients for long-term care. - Editor's Note

What's the heart of field education for you?

Joe: The heart of social work field education is just sharing time, talent, and experience. It's an awesome thing to watch intense growth in both students and instructors. It's just a matter of sharing with students and allowing them to share the same with you.

Tammy: It is the ultimate in social work education and in social work. It is and has always been my most fulfilling role in this discipline. I look forward to going to work when I have my students to work with, and along the way, I have honed my own clinical skills. I have become a better social worker because of my students. I learn with them, from them, and about them. It is just a perfect opportunity to play a role in the development of future social workers. I enjoy seeing them as they blossom and develop in their careers and I feel gratified knowing that I have played a part in that. I stay in touch with many of them. The feedback that I have received is that field placement has been a seminal part of their social work journey. I am honored to have been a part of so many of those journeys, and I take great pride in my role with these students. What is the heart of social work for me? It's about the relationship with students, their respective field instructors, and the faculty. I have developed amazing relationships with the academy as a field instructor/coordinator. Additionally, I have developed stronger relationships within my own employment environment. The role of field instructor offers the opportunity to participate in so many internal and external initiatives and to meet all kinds of people—it is a great networking opportunity. The heart of social work IS field education; it is the pulse and heart beat. Theories and processes are taught in the classroom, as they should be, but the heart of social work practice comes from the field placement.

What changes have you seen in field education over the years?

Tammy: First, I have seen a much more sophisticated group of students with stronger academic backgrounds than twenty years ago. I have come across many students who have entered the MSW program from other careers and carry other professional degrees. They have in many cases been working in the field for a good period of time, or have considerable volunteer experience. They appear to be well-travelled. This all contributes to a sophisticated student with high expectations of field instructors and placement. Because students are technologically savvy, it helps them to be creative and to think outside the box; it is exciting to see how they are integrating technology with clinical theories and processes. Student voices are invited and valued in field placement.

Joe: Diversity is one thing that I have noticed. Students are much more diverse than years ago.

There's been a lot of work on competencies in field. What theories/models, skills and behaviors do you see as most important for students in the field?

Joe: Working mostly in the area of delinquent youths, families, and communities, I would have to say cognitive behavioral approaches and family systems, and developmental theories, were probably the ones that stood out most for me. [Students need] to have a theoretical map. This is where the field of social work has grown—I don't think we wing it anymore. It's our job to give students the oppor-

tunity to take the theories and models they are learning, and put them into practice.

Tammy: There are so many models and theories that it is impossible to be expert in everything. It is important for clinical social workers to know about models used in community services in order to make appropriate referrals. Clinical social workers should be able to demonstrate specialized knowledge for intervention with individuals, families, and groups, in a culturally competent manner. Having a good grasp of general systems theory, psychodynamic theory, social learning theory, and conflict theory is central to a social work practice; developmental theory, CBT, personality theory, the personal practice model (PPM), and principles of group work are also important. With respect to models: problem-solving, task-centered, solution-focused, narrative, cognitive-behavioral, and crisis models are important. The use of self is fundamental to social work; practitioners need to be self-conscious and know what parts of themselves to use in practice and which to leave out. Our students are going to different settings, and different areas demand specialization in different theories and practice models.

Tammy: There are some work skills that students need to be familiar with. [One is documentation.] We are part of an online charting system – gone are the days where you write long assessments. You are limited by all kinds of documentation protocols, and it changes a lot. It changes fast. [Students also] need to learn how to prioritize.

Joe: [Students need] attending skills, empathy, the ability to listen actively, genuineness, certainly how to question and interview. I would expect that not all students have had the opportunity to practice those, but at least know that, “This is what I need to practice on.” Sometimes I see students having difficulty with documentation skills, because they come to an agency and the agency is very demanding about what needs to be written. The site provides the opportunity to learn documentation skills and also organizational skills.

Tammy: Research is important. As part of placement, I try to involve students in various research projects when possible. I identify students who will have an interest in a project and we work on it together. I tell the story of [how] I got involved in a research project [as a student]. I tell them how much fun it is, and how it will benefit their learning, and they’ll be cited as an investigator. I try to identify areas that would benefit from having an evaluation, and I present the students with a topic and guide them through it. They start with a literature review, and present to staff, to each other, and to their field instructor. Then we say, “OK, let’s see if you can do some interviewing.” We can get an [expedited review] from our research ethics board if it’s a quasi-research project, more of a learning experience. One student did some research and evaluation around the waiting room experience in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Now we’re using an inter-professional model of placement, and doing research to ask, “Are students enjoying the process more learning in a multidisciplinary model, or do they want to stick to the usual format, social worker to social worker?” The students that are [interested in research] embrace it very nicely. I had a very nervous student whom I asked to take

the lead on a project, and he did it beautifully. After he presented, he said, "This was very liberating for me." I have a group now that is participating with great enthusiasm; they feel that they're on the cusp of something new, that they have the opportunity to share [their findings] with the world and make a difference.

Joe: Students at Washington University are required to do a research project while they are in field. Students are taking what they're learning about evidence-based practice and research, and then doing research projects at their field site. They have a course that sets the student up prior to the practicum experience on evidence based practice. And then when the student goes [into field], that research teacher follows them at the practicum site and has contact with them during that process to help them. Let's just say [the student is] working on a site that does some drug counseling. The agency will say, "Here's what we use, here's the model that we're using." The student then can do a research project as to what works. The students could target an intervention used by the agency. Just because a model works for a certain population, it may not work for the client population the student is assigned. The St. Louis collaborative social work project sends students to practicum sites and works jointly with those sites.

Tammy: [There are certain behaviors and abilities that are crucial for social work students in field]. They need to learn how to be quick on their feet. Every few weeks you could be seeing another change; they need to learn how to adapt in changing environments. Also, students need to take placement seriously and [go beyond the call of duty]. They may not recognize how critical that placement is to their future, and may not necessarily [take advantage of] all the opportunities that that placement can offer them. Sometimes meetings or events may take place outside of their placement hours, and I notice that some students don't find their way there, even though I can assure them that the meeting was probably as important as the seminar they attended earlier that day during their placement hours.

Joe: Agencies are very demanding; students need to [keep up with the requirements, like documentation]. Students are also in school, and they're doing a practicum, and they get behind. They need to be prompt. As far as working at the court, or being a part of the court staff, [students are] held to the highest moral and ethical standards. I think it's important for practicum instructors to orient students to agency policy and practices, like dress code, because it will head off problems later.

What challenges have you met in field education?

Joe: Students have certainly challenged me. They keep us up to date. They ask a thousand questions. They keep you where you should be. They keep you away from being stagnant or being complacent in your job. They notice everything. They are certainly fun and challenging.

Tammy: From time to time you have a student that may be more demanding, or issues arise in placement. During my career, I have had a handful of these experiences. Challenging students were

my most rewarding, though. With each student like this I become better at what I do; the process is time-consuming but you rise to the occasion. I learned to collaborate with colleagues and not to take the task on myself. There were excellent teaching and learning opportunities. Two University of Toronto workshops that have been very helpful are workshops on conflict and on power and authority. Conflict does happen. You want to make sure you deal with it professionally so that relationships are preserved with colleagues, students, the school and others.

[Placements can be challenging because] students seem not to want to do social work that is not clinical, and they express disappointment if the amount of clinical work is not to their expectations. Some consider placement an ideal time for them to meet their immediate career goals; they may say, for example, "I want to do CBT. I want to be a CBT specialist" and that is all they want to do. For the most part they don't have a lot of interest at first in policy work, program development, education, administration, supervision or practice evaluation. The University of Toronto offers an administration stream in recognition of the fact that not all social workers are going to be involved solely in clinical practice. [But students] don't recognize the value of mezzo and macro practice and prefer micro alone.

Joe: [Maintaining agency commitment to social work training can be challenging]. A lot of workers in agencies who have the ability to be field instructors just don't want to give up their time; they say, "We're very busy and we don't have the time. And our caseloads are very high." Sometimes agencies just don't want students. They just don't want to take the time, and that's sad. In my department, I asked all of my supervisors to take students and to take training. It's just a matter of sharing with students and allowing them to share with you.

Tammy: I'm concerned about preserving numbers of good field placements. With a reduction of social workers in some organizations goes field placement opportunities. As workloads mount for social work staff, their interest and ability to take on social work students lessens. I think that non-traditional kinds of placements will be where we will be seeing some field opportunities. These are placements supervised by inter-professional field instructors and/or placements in environments that are not strictly clinical. The wave of the future may be placements shared between students from different professions or group placements, or two or more students with one field instructor. I've been piloting placements incorporating these themes and they are working very well. Traditionally, we have seen field instruction take place very much in the silos: a social worker trains a social worker. We've been experimenting with an inter-professional team approach where a nurse and social work educator will train a nurse and social work student. It is a lot of work, and you have to deal with a number of players and respect boundaries and be careful that your social workers and the other students in that group are meeting their competency training. Although their roles may be overlapping, [students must] carry with them that social work lens all the time even though they're learning from, with, and about each other.

How can schools of social work support field instructors?

Tammy: Training for field instructors is really critical. The University of Toronto offers ongoing supportive workshops for field instructors which I take. Refresher courses about clinical practice are just as important for field educators as supportive workshops. [Being a field instructor for the University of Toronto] gives you the opportunity to sign up for courses at a reduced cost. University of Toronto has been excellent in making courses available on a very regular basis, sometimes by video conference. If social workers can't get there, they can hook-up from their workplace. Support is very important. Having a "go to" person at the Faculty is crucial. Academic appointments for field instructors are important. Recognizing the role of field instructors by acknowledging their roles is valuable: letters from the University to the employer senior leadership team, profiling accomplishments when possible, celebrations like events marking years of service, etc.

Joe: In the St. Louis area, the schools of social work have formed a collaborative which has reached out to agencies and practicum instructors to develop a relationship. St. Louis University, Washington University and University of Missouri St. Louis work together in the community. They share work sites. They share agencies. They provide training jointly. They have ongoing supervision seminars. They also offer courses or seminars from practicum instructors that really help us in daily practice. Whatever you're working on—they seem to find it—whether it's an update on a model; it's just whatever the need is. They communicate well, so that if there's a need and you express it, they present it. The schools of social work also celebrate their field instructors. We have "social work week." A workshop is offered every day, for the week, as well as a luncheon and breakfast. The field instructors are given adjunct [positions] at the universities. I have been lecturing at St. Louis University as well as University of Missouri St. Louis and Washington University on juvenile justice. They recognize the work we're doing and ask us to come back to share [our knowledge] with other social workers or field instructors or even students.

What do you see as the future of field education?

Joe: Truthfully, it's better than when I started years ago. We're better educated today than we were. I think the schools are doing an excellent job. When I first started, social workers were not as well respected in the juvenile justice area. People in the criminal justice field see us better than they did. We're better disciplined today. We use research much more than we ever have. The focus on evidence-based practice and research provides a better balance overall. What it does provide is better collaboration between field instructors and agencies.

Last summer, I did some practicum site evaluations for Washington University. I was impressed with the field instructors. Wow! What awesome work social workers are doing at different agencies. They are taking on students and doing a good job. Taking on students enhances you, your agency, and certainly your community. You're training students and ensuring that they will proceed with the skills and the values of our profession. It's up to us to transmit that. You'll find social workers are just people with heart. They work for not a lot of money. They work a lot of hours and carry heavy

caseloads. I don't know if you can find more dedicated people out there than social workers.

Tammy: From my point of view, I see [the future of field education] as solid and rich with opportunities. Organizations really value the social work student role; students contribute a lot to the organization and bring vigor and enthusiasm. I believe that it is recognized that field instructors become stronger clinicians by taking on students, thereby benefiting the organization as well. We profile our field instructors in field education because we value them and want them to know that. I feel that it's a very solid, core experience of the education journey. With the onset of inter-professional placements, it will [improve the future of field education], as students learn not only in silos, but learn together. Field placement is such a critical piece of social work learning. I don't know that students even recognize that the relationships that they are making and forming during that period can last them an entire career, and introduce them to many professional and personal opportunities. I am still in touch with my own field instructors; they were instrumental in my career and personal life. I give them a lot of credit for trusting me, teaching me and supporting me. They were and are mentors and role models for me, and I hope I am able to be the same for our students. I would not want to see a reduction of placement hours or time; if anything, I would like to see more placement hours. I don't think enough can be done to pay attention to field placement, to change it as necessary, to bump it up where needed, to celebrate it, and to recognize it. It is a critical piece.