

Learning Agreement Assignment

Almost immediately students and field instructors will begin talking about the work they will be doing together in the semesters ahead. It is, however, highly unlikely that this is the first time the conversation or the thinking about “student assignments” has happened. Field instructors would have discussed assignments possibilities in their annual application for site approval, students and field instructors would have talked about assignments during the interview, and field instructors probably would have already talked with agency/organization colleagues prior to the start of the school year. The learning agreement formalizes and expands on those discussions.

This is a student-assignment, however it requires significant input from the field instructor. In reality it is a deeply relational document. It is created at the very beginning of the student - field instructor relationship. It is a wonderful opportunity for collaboration, curiosity, discovery, exploration, visioning, agreement, and building some authentic connections. The student becomes the document writer and the field instructor is the consultant. Below is the format for the final written assignment.

Cover Page

The student should include the following on the first page. If there is additional information that seems relevant to the placement, students should be encouraged to include that, as well.

- Student name
- Faculty field liaison name
- Field instructor name
- Agency and program name
- Agency Address
- Contact information
- Student Schedule agreement (beginning and ending dates, day of the week and arrival and departure times)
- Anticipated dates student will be absent from field

Section One: Agency/Organization Description

- Describe how you learned what you know about your agency or organization so far. (website, conversations with professionals, word on the street, etc.)
- In your own words, write what it is that you do know about the place where you will be spending the year working and learning.
- This is also a good time to list any additional questions you have about the agency.

Section Two: Relationship to the Work

- Describe your particular relationship to the work of the agency/organization.
- This includes any personal anecdotes, educational background, or work background.
- It could also include a related long or short-term interest of yours that you know very little about or have very little experience with.
- Please take the time to think deeply so as not to miss any “overlapping stories” that just might reveal ‘some’ connection to some piece of where you have been placed.

Section Three

Because this document is due to your liaison within the first month of placement, there is a general acceptance that your work will be fluid and may perhaps change within the complexity of your organization’s context. In other words, it is quite likely that the ideas presented in this section could change over the lifecycle of your internship. Therefore, the work here should reflect a discussion that charts a “lightly held” path for your work with some vision for how it will evolve over the two semesters. Part of that vision should include ongoing review and revision of your assignments.

There are three parts to this section (an example of a possible format follows).

- 1) Describe your specific plans for engagement. This includes the actual work you will do with clients, patients, service-users, students, members, etc. It also includes collaborations you will be developing with colleagues and outside community members. Keep in mind that a well-rounded generalist social work learning experience includes work with individuals, families, and small groups. It also includes organizational practice and community work.
- 2) Look at your assignments in conjunction with the learning objectives in the field syllabi. Determine whether your assignments (above) will give you the opportunity to meet these learning objectives and then show the specifics of your determination next to each assignment. This is very important as your ending evaluation will document your progress on the learning objectives – therefore, you really want to make sure you have assignments that will give you the opportunity to make progress and meet those objectives. You will notice that there are parenthetical notations after each learning objective. These objectives have been approved as “outcome measures of student learning” by our national accrediting body (CSWE). Therefore a student’s identification of the relationship between field assignments and learning objectives indicates that the student work in the field is related to these overall academic program outcome measures.
- 3) Discuss your plan for how you and your field instructor will be able to determine your progress for each of your assignments. Write your evaluative and self - assessment plan for each assignment.

Section Four

Because your work with your supervisor(s) will be central to your learning, describe your plan for supervision and support. This can include agency practices, as well as the individual agreement you and your field instructor make. Please include formal and informal processes. It would also be interesting for you to think about and list any significant other 'mentor' or 'consultant' to your work.

Section Five

Below is a copy of the Student Safety Agreement Policy. Please review and discuss this with your field instructor then narrate (here in Section Five) your understanding of the relationship between "safety" and your work within the agency.

Student Safety Agreements

Field agencies and organizations are responsible for communicating a plan of safety for any and all students confirming a placement with them. Since most agencies and organizations have existing safety procedures, policies, or practices they should feel free to refer to that which already exists. However, it is important that field instructors and students discuss general plans for safety within the first two weeks of the field placement. Safety issues could include things like approaches to working with potentially violent or unpredictable client situations, making home visits to places where the student may be unwelcome or there is doubt about the acceptance of the visit, working with clients who are incarcerated or on furlough for violent assaults, and responses to threatening statements, letters, phone calls, e-mails or other communications directed to the student or other agency personnel.

Section Five of the student's Learning Agreement will be the student's understanding (a description/summary of the discussion between student and field instructor) of the relationship between "safety" and their work within the agency.

If an incident occurs in which a student is personally threatened or hurt, or if the student is involved in an accident of any kind, the student will immediately inform the field instructor, faculty field liaison. The faculty field liaison will inform the field education coordinator. An incident report will be completed by the field education coordinator and placed in the student's file. The field education coordinator will review the situation with the student, faculty field liaison, and field instructor, and together they will determine the student's readiness to return to the field.

Section Six

If applicable, please list any agreements between student and field agency in which the student will receive monetary compensation.

Section Seven

This is your signature page. Please make sure that at the end of this document there is a space that you, your field instructor(s), your faculty field liaison, and I can sign, indicating agreement with the content. Type our names under the signature lines and add a date notation.

SECTION THREE EXAMPLE:

Engagement Assignment #1: *JB will visit two families in their homes and communities on a weekly basis with the goal of helping to facilitate a less physically violent home environment. She will attend meetings with the families, and other providers, participate in written work, and participate in all levels of the planning process.*

Related Learning Objectives/CSWE Standards:

- #3. Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments. (EPAS 2.1.3)*
- #4. Engage diversity and difference in practice. (EPAS 2.1.4)*
- #9. Respond to contexts that shape practice. (EPAS 2.1.9)*
- #10. Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. (EPAS 2.1.10)*

Process for Determining Student Progress/Evaluative Plan:

JB will request feedback from her supervisor and from her clients and colleagues regarding her direct practice work, her communication skills, and her professional approach to the work. JB will work with families to identify the safety risks at the beginning of their work together and at several points throughout to see if safety is increasing in their home environments.

NOTE: Please make sure you follow the same format for each of your assignments. Some may be more complicated than others and that's fine. Some may have many related learning objectives and some may have just one. The important thing is to get the beginning map of your work in the field on paper. You will revisit this document several times throughout the year, revising your assignments as you go along.