

# DEVELOPING YOUR LEARNING AGREEMENT



*(A how-to-guide for mapping your path through the concentration year field and learning agreement)*

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# MAPPING YOUR JOURNEY

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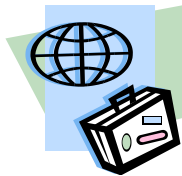


## Step 1: PLANNING YOUR JOURNEY

*Thinking, Reflecting, Researching and Mapping*

*As an example of a relational document, this student assignment-the learning agreement- requires significant input from your field instructor as well as your review of the course blackboard page containing the syllabus and assignments and the department web site outlining field policies and expectations.*

<http://www.uvm.edu/~socwork/?Page=field/default.html>



1. Reflect on the path you've taken to date in terms of social work practice and experience as well as your goals for the future. Where have you been? Who are you becoming as a social worker? Where do you want to be as a social worker at the end of this year? What do you bring to this year's field learning experience? What are your hopes and aspirations for it? Take the time to think deeply so as to not miss any "overlapping issues" that just might reveal connections to some piece of your work this year.



2. Collaborate with your field instructor for identification of learning assignments, practice opportunities and tasks. Discuss how to integrate your classroom assignments with activities in the field. Don't forget that they, along with your field liaison and other Department of Social Work faculty, are your partners on this journey.



3. Discover as much about your agency and the opportunities available to you as you can. Take this opportunity to meet with other staff to learn about their work. This will not only help you write the description of your field site agency but also identify possible assignments and activities to discuss with your field instructor.



4. Based on the discussions above, make a list of what you and your field instructor have agreed you will be doing in your field placement. You can include such activities as participation in meetings and trainings, interviews with employees in your agency, advocacy on behalf of your client population, consulting research literature, as well as direct contact with clients. Together these will form your learning assignments in the field this year. *Remember that over the course of two semesters you must show that you've had assignments reflective of work with or on behalf of individuals, families, small groups, communities and organizations.*



5. It is absolutely appropriate to use some field hours to prepare and write the learning agreement. It will help to have a discussion now with your field instructor about how to preserve time for this, the four course-required process recordings, the policy and research note, the portfolio, and the field evaluations.



## Step 2: Writing the Learning Agreement

*(Where you start and how you plan for this year-long journey informs where and how your adventure will go. If you haven't completed Step 1-Planning- START OVER)*

*Following the structure outlined below gives you practice in following a prescribed written format. Ensuring that your written product is in the format required is something you will have to do often, whether you are involved in work with individuals, families, groups, (case notes, court reports, insurance billing), organizations (program proposals, manuals, evaluations, grant requests) or communities (advocacy plans, opinion pieces, policy proposals).*



There are seven distinct sections of the Learning Agreement as well as a separate cover page. Start with the beginning ones (agency/organization; relationship to the work) and not the middle (section three: identification of field assignments connected to objectives) as clearly your assignments will flow from what you bring to the work as well as your goals and they are framed by what experiences and activities the field agency can provide. It is your choice whether or not to write about your background, activities, and assignments using the first person or third person voice.

## **SECTION 1: AGENCY/ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION**

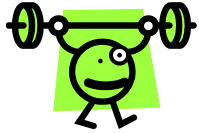
*Transformative practice involves understanding the context of our work. In order to be most effective, we need to understand the purpose, focus, and scope of the organization in which we work. Understanding the agency's structure, policies, and funding enables you not only to be a more effective practitioner for your client, but also to be a better advocate for systems changes to benefit them. In addition, you are an ambassador for your field placement. You'll be asked on several occasions (whether in inter-agency meetings or at gatherings with friends and family) to explain, for example, "What does the Happy Heart Agency really do?" Consider this a learning opportunity for you to more fully understand and then be able to better answer that question.*

You can discover much about your field placement site through formal and informal conversations, brochures and web pages (as part of Step 1) along with "word on the street". In your own words (NOT cut and paste or direct quotations) describe here what do you know about the agency such as its mission, its function and purpose, its organizational structure (governance, staffing, source of funding, type). You can identify any questions you may have at this juncture about the agency and which you can then investigate and explorer further as part of one of your learning tasks.

## **SECTION 2: YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORK**

*Consider this as practice for when you go job hunting with your MSW in hand and have to talk about yourself and what you would bring to that particular setting.*

How is this setting reflective of a long-held or recent interest of yours? What do you bring in terms of any personal, educational or work experience/background to the work of the agency/organization? Possible areas might include:



Personal and professional experiences, assets and strengths you came into the MSW program with, along with those you've gained or enhanced after your first year in the MSW program and the field. Consider the additional understandings, knowledge and skills you gained over the summer.



Your own personal and professional goals for growth and development in transformative social work practices in this year's field placement. Reach for the stars!

### **SECTION 3: FIELD ASSIGNMENTS**



*This is where the rubber meets the road in the map of your journey. It shows the direct link between your goals, the various field tasks and assignments and the course objectives. These objectives and their accompanying practice behaviors are found in the course syllabus for SWSS 390.*

#### **Assignment Description**

Typically students have between 4-6 different field assignments. Make sure that overall your assignments will give you the opportunity to make progress on the practice behaviors related to each of the 9 course learning objectives.

Keep wording clear, concise, and specific (such as how many clients, what type of group, the specific theories you will learn about and how, the type of contact with families, your role, etc.). You can and should include language that reflects what you are learning in the curriculum.

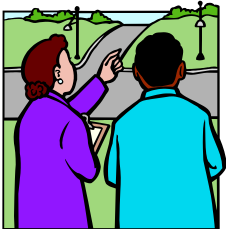
## Related Course Objectives

You may find that the 9 course objectives could possibly be addressed by a single field assignment or task, as generally any one activity offers multiple areas for learning. Nevertheless for each particular assignment, select no more than those 3-4 learning objectives and practice behaviors which most direct relevant to the skills you will be demonstrating through it.

## Evaluation Process and Progress

Evaluation is also a practice activity. Methods should identify not only the process (the means by which you and your field instructor and others-including clients- will evaluate your progress on each assignment as they relate to the specific learning objectives) but also the criteria (how will you and others know you are making progress met the objective?). While not required, the practice behaviors accompanying specific objectives could be incorporated into the description of the process for determining your progress/supervision plan

## SECTION 4: SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT



*Supervision is an integral and essential element of social work practice. Writing this section should be used as an opportunity to start the conversation with your field instructor(s) about what you all want and expect out of supervision. Who and what else might be involved with the supervision and support of our learning? What agency trainings or practices will be involved?*

In describing the plan for supervision and support include both the informal and formal processes. If you have both off site and on site instructors describe their respective roles in their supervision of your practice.



Specify the identified day/time of the weekly formal supervision with your field instructor.

Include the identified dates for turning the written course assignments.

## **SECTION 5: STUDENT SAFETY PLAN**



After reviewing the particulars of the SW Department Student Safety Agreement Policy please write up the unique plan that is specific to your work within the field placement.

## **SECTION 6: MONETARY COMPENSATION**



If you are receiving any stipend or payment from your field setting, indicate what that agreement is here.

## **SECTION 7: SIGNATURES**



*Similar to a contract, by signing this you and your field instructor indicate your agreement with and support for the activities, goals and objectives of this learning agreement.*

Leave spaces for your signature, those of your field instructor (s), your field liaison, and the field coordinator. Type the names under each line and leave space for the date notation. Prior to turning it into your field liaison, make sure that you and your field instructor (s) have signed and dated it.

*and lastly create a separate cover page which will be the first page of your learning agreement*

## **COVER PAGE (separate page)**

Names and roles -yours, your MSW field instructor, other agency supervisors as relevant, field liaison

Contact information for each ( both email and phone)

Agency field placement, and specific program site as relevant,

Name and address including both physical and mailing if separate

Field placement schedule for the year

Specific beginning date in August/Sept and ending date in May

Weekly placement schedule – days of the week

Known breaks/absences from the field

## FIELD ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLES FOR SECTION 3



**Assignment #1: I will be an active member of the North End Enterprise Zone work group. I will facilitate 2 meetings, prepare reports and make recommendations for community change in this area.**

### **Related Objectives**

6. Engage groups and communities
1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
3. Advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice
5. Engage in policy practice

### **Evaluation:**

I will complete the tasks as assigned. Reports will be well written, comprehensive and free of jargon. I will request feedback from work group participants as well as my field instructor regarding my advanced practice skills such as listening openly and collaboratively and advocating for reforms that enable transformative change. Supervision discussions as well as the content of reports written will reflect my integration of the N.A.S.W. Code of Ethics. In supervision I will outline the elements of my critical thinking re choice of the policy practice intervention. The reflection section of process recordings will illustrate increasing depth in my self-awareness.

**Assignment #2:** In the role of a school social worker, I will have a caseload of 3 students. I will meet regularly with each student individually and initiate parent/guardian contact. Additionally, I will complete clinical and organizational documentation required by both the school and the community mental health center.

### **Related Objectives**

2. Engage diversity and difference in practice
7. Assess individuals, families
8. Intervene with individuals, families

### **Evaluation**

Tasks as outlined will be completed. Feedback from field instructor, teachers, and clients will be obtained. Process recordings will demonstrate how I am employing competing theories of human behavior as well as practice interventions and prioritizing client narratives.

**Assignment #3:** I will attend at least one training session that is informed by research on practice with people from diverse backgrounds. In addition I will consult research based literature that is focused on working collaboratively with families from different cultures. I will critically examine these research informed practice approaches in supervisory meetings with my field instructor and will thoughtfully apply what I have learned to my practice.

### **Related Objectives:**

4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities

### **Evaluation:**

Training session attended. Research based articles presented in clinical rounds. Process recordings will demonstrate thoughtful application of research based knowledge related to diversity. Research note reviewed.



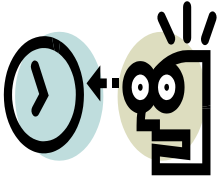
When lost or confused, stop and ask for directions from your field instructor, your field liaison and your classmates.

Remember that this is a journey and there will be unexpected detours and delays, as well as changes of direction and new opportunities and destinations once you think you've got it all mapped out. That's fine. The learning agreement is a "work in progress" and will be revised and updated.

Have fun and enjoy the ride!

## Step 3: Getting There On Time

*Fall Due Dates*



\* The learning agreement is due no later than Sept. 31.

Your field instructor needs to have provided input, reviewed it and signed it before your field liaison receives it. The signed original then is placed in your field file (which you have access to) in the Social Work Department. Make sure that both you and your field instructor keep a copy for yourselves.

Your learning agreement describes the map for your journey as a social work student in the field this year. You will want to regularly review it with your field instructor during supervisory meetings as a way of keeping on course.

\* Process recordings for the fall semester are due to your **field liaison** no later than Oct. 28 and Dec. 2

\* Research and Policy Notes are due Dec. 9

\* Dec. Conversation Evaluation is due Dec. 9

# Getting There On Time con't

## *Spring Due Dates*



At the beginning of second semester your learning agreement is to be formally revised in order: 1) to respond to any field liaison feedback on the original document regarding areas needing to be addressed, 2) to identify the changes as a result of completed assignments, 3) and to identify any new or clarified assignments which were identified during the December conversation or 4) to indicate no changes.

- \* The LA update (approved and signed by your field instructor) is due to your field liaison no later than February 3.
- \* Specific due dates for two required process recordings in the Spring will be posted on the course blackboard site in Jan.
- \* Field Portfolio is due April 28
- \* Final Evaluation is due May 5