

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE MANDATES

ETHICS, VALUES, AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (NASW) CODE OF ETHICS

All students and field instructors in the social work program have the responsibility to be familiar with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. It is expected that all students, field instructors, and faculty will abide by the Code. A copy of the current Code can be found in Appendix B or downloaded from the NASW website located at: www.socialworkers.org. The development of ethical standards must also be an integral piece of each student's learning contract and incorporated into supervision sessions. Students are to learn the intrinsic principles of the Code and have opportunities to apply these principles to practice in their field placement. Part of professional social work training includes commitment to the NASW Code of Ethics, which states in part that social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.

Other items relate to such issues as developing cultural competence, working to improve employing agencies' policies and procedures, and taking action through appropriate channels when colleagues are impaired, incompetent, or unethical. Learning to apply these commitments in social work practice through the field placement is a very difficult and sensitive matter. Yet, we want to take with the utmost seriousness our obligation to teach and to stand up for values and ethics for the social work profession as defined by the Code of Ethics. Field instructors are encouraged to utilize agency orientation as a means to identify and discuss procedures related to advocacy, professional responsibility and appropriate avenues for problem-solving.

LIABILITY ISSUES

The University provides professional liability insurance for all students who are officially registered for the field education courses. Students pay for this coverage in their fees when they register for field education courses. Agencies/organizations shall maintain adequate general liability and professional liability insurance as well. ***Students may also purchase additional liability insurance as members of NASW; premiums are reasonable for considerable coverage.***

Students are covered through the end of semester of session for which they are enrolled. Field placements extended beyond this time must receive prior approval by the coordinator of field education. To initiate the process, the student, in concert with the field instructor, must initiate this request in writing by sending the coordinator of field education a letter on agency letterhead detailing the request for extension of the field placement, the reasons for the extension, and the date when the student will be finished. ***Extensions will only be granted for the purposes of meeting the student's educational requirements (not for the convenience or desire of the agency).*** This request will be forwarded to the Business Services Office of the University for review and approval.

Each student signs a liability statement in their field application (see the field application in the Appendix D) and a copy of this is forwarded to the agency when the student is interviewed for placement. This statement indicates that students are not covered by workman's compensation in the State of Michigan for any accident/injury that may occur

during the field placement. The student's individual medical insurance plan is responsible for all expenses incurred during field placement time. The University and School of Social Work assume no responsibility or liability for any injury that may be sustained during field placement. In some agencies, students may be required to use their personally owned vehicle for transportation purposes. All students are required to have a valid driver's license, indicate that they can operate a motor vehicle without restriction (unless indicated on the application), carry current vehicle insurance and agree to be in compliance with the laws of the State of Michigan.

If the student is involved in an automobile accident while on field placement business, the student's personal vehicle insurance is the first tier for a claim and the University's policy is secondary subject to the terms of the coverage in the University's contract. If a student is to utilize their personally owned vehicle for field placement activities (including the transportation of clients), it is the agency's responsibility to inform the student of these expectations prior to acceptance into the placement and also to evaluate the student's ability to perform the required tasks. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that the student's vehicle is in good, safe, working condition.

Agencies/organizations have the opportunity to sign Western Michigan University's "Hold Harmless" agreement (see Appendix E), which holds the University and agency harmless should suits, claims, or damages result directly from the student placement. Agencies can also request that the University sign their individual affiliation agreements, which take about 4-6 weeks to process, and are reviewed by the University attorneys and the Business Office for approval.

STATE OF MICHIGAN CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS

Students should be aware that many agencies require that students complete a State of Michigan records clearance prior to starting their field placement. This is essentially a background check whereby the student completes a set of forms that are sent to the State of Michigan and reviewed for previous criminal activities and convictions that would prevent the student from working with specified client groups. Students are to indicate if they have a criminal history when applying to the School of Social Work and again on their field application. This serves to ensure that the student is not sent to an agency for an interview for placement if the student has prior convictions that would prohibit them from being placed in that particular agency. **Students are typically required to undergo the same scrutiny as potential agency employees.** Students who do not indicate that they have a prior criminal history may be subject to the School's Professional Review Committee (PRC) process, which could result in termination from the program.

MANDATORY REPORTING AND DUTY TO WARN

The State of Michigan has laws which cover the mandatory reporting of child or elder abuse and the duty to warn if a client is harmful to him/herself or others. Field instructors are responsible for educating all students with regard to these laws. Students should not be required to be the primary mandated reporter while functioning as an intern in an agency. This role is reserved for the agency-based field instructor who is responsible for ensuring that all agency policies, regulations, laws, and ethical obligations are followed. The student can assist and should have exposure to situations that involve mandatory reporting and duty to warn.

DISABILITY AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 extends and implements civil rights protections for disabled individuals on the basis of race, color, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, veteran status, or disability. Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact the WMU director of disabled student services at the beginning of the semester to have their request evaluated. The **Office of Disabled Student Services** will make a disability determination before the instructor (including the agency-based field instructor) provides any accommodations. Information from this evaluation should be shared with the coordinator of field education and the agency field instructor who must evaluate the agency's ability to provide the accommodation prior to accepting the student for field placement.

NONDISCRIMINATION AND HUMAN DIVERSITY

Every aspect of the School's educational program is conducted without discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, age, creed, ethnic or national origin, disabilities, political beliefs, or sexual orientation. The faculty, staff, and student body of the School of Social Work will reflect the diversity of our society. The School will maintain an atmosphere in which there is an appreciation of human diversity and where people of varied backgrounds and characteristics feel supported, valued, and empowered to pursue their individual professional development.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN FIELD PLACEMENT

In order to maintain an environment in which the dignity and worth of all students is respected, it is the policy of the School of Social Work at Western Michigan University that sexual harassment of students in their field placements is unacceptable. It is a form of behavior that seriously undermines the atmosphere of trust essential to the learning environment. This policy is in keeping with federal and state laws prohibiting sex discrimination. It is also the policy of the University that willful false accusations of sexual harassment will not be condoned. The School of Social Work recognizes that, in many instances, sexual harassment policies and procedures adopted by Western Michigan University may not apply to the sexual harassment of a student in an agency where he or she is not an employee of the agency or where harassment is coming from someone who is not a University instructor. It is important that there be guidelines that pertain to complaints regarding sexual harassment of students because of the unavoidable subordinate position students experience in field placement settings. Sexual harassment of students can be destructive to the learning environment, demoralizing to the student and adversely affect his or her performance in the agency. Forms of sexual harassment may include harassment from a field instructor or an agency employee. Sexual harassment is defined as follows:

- Sexual harassment may involve the behavior of the field instructor on any person employed by the field agency of either sex against a person of the opposite or same sex when such behaviors fall within the definition outlined below.

- Sexual harassment of a student from Western Michigan University is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, verbal or other expressive behaviors, or physical conduct commonly understood to be of a sexual nature when:
 - Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's continued placement.
 - Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as a basis for decisions or assessments affecting the individual's welfare of a student placed in the agency.
 - Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably and substantially interfering with an individual's welfare, academic, or professional performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, offensive and demeaning work or educational environment.

Examples of Prohibited Behavior

Prohibited acts of sexual harassment may take a variety of forms ranging from subtle pressure for sexual activity to physical assault. Examples of the kinds of conduct included in the definition of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Threat or intimidation of sexual relations or sexual contact, which is not freely or mutually agreeable to both parties
- Continual or repeated verbal abuses of a sexual nature including graphic commentaries about a person's body, sexually suggestive objects or pictures placed in the work or study area that may embarrass or offend the person, sexually degrading words to describe the person, or propositions of a sexual nature
- Threats or insinuation that the person's employment, grades, wages, promotional opportunities, classroom or work assignments, or other conditions of continued placement may be adversely affected by not submitting to sexual advances.

Consensual Relationship's

Consensual sexual relationships between field instructor and student, or between student and an agency employee, are not condoned and may be a violation of the NASW Code of Ethics. Such relationships, though they may be appropriate in other settings, are inappropriate when they occur between members of the teaching staff and students. Field instructors are considered "faculty in the field" and are, thus, teaching staff. A professional power differential exists in these situations in terms of the influence and authority which the one can exercise over the other. If a charge of sexual harassment is lodged regarding a once consenting relationship, the burden may be on the alleged offender to prove that the sexual harassment policy was not violated.

Procedures

When a student believes that he or she has been the subject of sexual harassment in the field agency setting, the student should notify his or her field instructor and faculty liaison immediately. It is important to not let the situation continue, so early notification is very important. The student may also wish to discuss the issue with his or her advisor, the School of Social Work's director of student services, the coordinator of field education or a School of Social Work faculty member. If the sexual harassment involves the student's agency instructor, the student should notify the faculty liaison immediately. The faculty member receiving the report shall immediately notify the coordinator of field

education who will notify the director of the School of Social Work who, with the faculty liaison and student, will investigate the complaint.

Based on the investigation, the director of the School of Social Work, in conjunction with the coordinator of field education, shall determine if the agency's policy on sexual harassment has been followed and if the student is safe and will be free from further harassment. The outcome of the investigation will contain recommendations regarding the future of the student's placement within the same agency and/or transfer to a different agency. If the complaint is founded and unable to be appropriately and satisfactorily addressed, future use of the agency as a field placement site will be evaluated.

Finally, students and agency-based field instructors should be aware of the following sections of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics:

1.11 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

2.08 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not sexually harass supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.¹

¹ National Association of Social Workers. 1999. *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington, D.C.