

West Virginia University School of Social Work Field Education Problem-Solving Process

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Program and Field Team Makeup

- On campus BSW and MSW Program, Online MSW program
- Approximately 160-180 students in field per year
- Field director and 2 coordinators (all faculty)
- Liaisons are sometimes field team members and sometimes other faculty
- Coordinators are responsible for placement
- Liaisons support active placements and consult with Field Director

Phased Problem Solving Process

- Basis for addressing problems initiated by student or supervisor
- Issues noticed by the liaison are generally addressed through an academic process
- Process includes students wishing to change placement for any reason after the placement has begun
- Escalate as necessary principle
- Encourages students to be engaged as problem-solvers

Phase 1

- Problem/concern is identified to the field liaison
- Student and field instructor are encouraged to have an open conversation about resolution
- This is often the end of the process in which case it is not necessarily documented formally

Phase 2

- Slightly elevated from phase 1
- Involves liaison making more active suggestions for resolution, possible reframing the concern to provide perspective
- Encourages the student and field instructor to readdress the concern with new perspective
- Field liaison documents the conversation internally

Phase 3

- This phase involves the student, supervisor(s), and liaison having a joint meeting to discuss the specific concern
- This conversation should review what has already been tried, state a clear plan of what will be tried next, and a date that the liaison will check back to see if the issue is resolved
- The liaison notifies the field director
- Phase 3 is added to internal documentation form

Phase 4

- Actively involves Field Education Director
- Meeting scheduled with FED, Liaison, supervisor(s), and student
- Clear and direct discussion about challenge, review of steps taken thus far, plan for resolution with short turn around
- This meeting makes clear that the next step would likely lead to a placement termination
- Field Director adds to internal documentation form
- Program Director (MSW or BSW) is notified

Phase 5

- Phase is reached when placement cannot be salvaged
- If possible and appropriate, field office participates in a termination meeting with field agency
- Placement termination generally leads to an Academic Review
 - This involves program director, student's advisor, field director, BSW or MSW committee members, and student
 - Student has the opportunity to share their perspective
 - The committee makes decisions as to how placement termination impacts degree plan (repeat entire field experience, re-placement, dismissal from program, etc)

Challenges

- Field agency may jump ahead without appropriately involving liaison
- Student may not understand the gravity of the phase they are in
- Ensuring all liaisons are communicating in a timely fashion
- Employer-based placements can be complicated due to HR policies
- Mismatch between student and agency/supervisor can be challenging to tease out from more serious concerns

Future considerations

- Documentation process, from liaisons and supervisors
- More uniform documentation for students
- Continued efforts to train students and supervisors about process