

## WVU Field Placement Problem-Solving Process

The SSW makes every effort to keep students in their original placement locations when appropriate and safe to do so. In the event that a placement change is desired, and before initiating any action or making any decisions which could have an impact on the agreed upon placement plan, the student and/or the Field Instructor shall consult with the Faculty Field Liaison. If the FFL is not available, the Field Office is to be consulted. Under no circumstance will a student be removed from an in-progress placement without a meeting of all appropriate parties involved. The only exception to this policy is if the Field Instructor deems that the student, agency staff, and/or clients would be harmed by continuation of the placement.

The SSW has adopted a phased approach to problem resolution, whereby, concerns should be addressed between the student and Field Instructor first, with continued escalation and faculty engagement when issues are not resolved. This phased process is also inclusive of issues that may be presented by the Field Instructor regarding the student. The SSW believes that the process of problem solving on one's own behalf can be an important part of the student's education and respects the right of the student to raise and pursue issues regarding their field work placement. *See Appendix A: Problem-Solving Phases Phase*

**Phase 1** involves the Field Instructor, Faculty Field Liaison, and/or the Field Director coaching the student to attempt to resolve the problem for themselves. While students may seek counsel from others, they should be encouraged to address problems in collaboration with their Field Instructor as a first step. If this approach is unsuccessful, the issue escalates to Phase 2.

**Phase 2** introduces consultation with the Faculty Field Liaison by the person raising the issue, seeking new ideas and solutions, and continued efforts to resolve the issue between the Field Instructor and the student with new insights and ideas. If this approach is unsuccessful, the issue escalates to Phase 3.

**Phase 3** enlists the active involvement of the Faculty Field Liaison, with the student, Field Instructor and Faculty Field Liaison engaging in a joint meeting to discuss the issue and work toward resolution. At this point the Field Education Director is also notified of the issue. If this approach is unsuccessful, the issue escalates to Phase 4.

**Phase 4** enlists the active involvement of the Field Education Director, with the student, Field Instructor, Faculty Field Liaison and Field Education Director engaging in a joint meeting to discuss the issue and work toward resolution. If this approach is unsuccessful, the issue escalates to Phase 5.

**Phase 5** enlists the consultation of the BSW or MSW Program Director for input regarding the issue. At this time, and with input from the Program Director, the Field Education Director will determine whether the situation should be referred to the appropriate BSW or MSW Committee for Academic Review, the placement should be changed, and student reassigned, etc. Final decisions for issues escalating to Phase 5 will be made by the Field Education Director. If the student wishes to appeal a decision made by the Field Education Director, or the Academic Review Committee, they are referred to the WVU Student Conduct Code.

## **Addressing Performance and/or Problematic Behaviors**

Field placements are made after a thoughtful placement process that includes active student and agency participation and choice. Field placements, once confirmed and committed to, are not changed without considerable cause. If the conclusion is reached by the Field Education Director, Faculty Field Liaison and Field Instructor that a placement should be discontinued, an assessment will be made jointly whether a student should be reassigned to another Field Instructor in the same agency or to another agency setting. Students who disrupt a placement without prior consultation and approval of the Faculty Field Liaison and the Field Office risk receiving a failing grade.

Problematic behaviors leading to an unsatisfactory rating or termination are not typically illegal or immoral but are instead a recurrent series of minor problems indicating a lack of readiness for professional social work. Although placement terminations and unsatisfactory ratings occur infrequently, they present challenging situations for the student, the Field Instructor, Site Supervisor, and the Field Faculty Liaison.

Students entering their Field Experiences will be held accountable for their behavior and actions. Although not an exhaustive list, students should actively work to avoid the following examples of unacceptable and problematic behaviors. Each of the behaviors listed could be a reason for justifiable termination of a student in field.

- Disregard for WVU or agency policies, rules, and regulations.
- A hostile, resistant, or combative attitude toward learning, the Field Instructor, or others in the agency.
- Chronic tardiness and/or absenteeism.
- Behaviors that may demonstrate values inconsistent with core social work values.
- Emotional immaturity that interferes with the ability to effectively practice social work.
- Unprofessional behavior, including inappropriate communications and disrespect to agency staff and/or clients.
- Behavior that is emotionally damaging to clients.
- Boundary violations, inappropriate self-disclosure, or other concerns regarding the student's ability to maintain appropriate and professional contact with clients.
- Conflicts of interest; unforeseeable or previously undisclosed.

When student issues and unacceptable or problematic behaviors become evident, the Field Instructor and/or Site Supervisor should document the observed behaviors and arrange a meeting with the 36 student to bring awareness to the issue and address the behavior. If the Field Instructor or Site Supervisor is unable to resolve the difficulties during the conference or sees no improvement following the conference, they should immediately contact the Faculty Field Liaison, who will fully engage the Phased Problem-Solving approach. If the difficulties remain unresolved and lead to an early termination of the placement, the field supervisor(s) will be asked to provide documentation around the issues leading to the decision.

## **Termination of Field Placement**

Termination from a field placement may occur when either the Faculty Field Liaison, Field Instructor, or Field Education Director feels that there are concerns about a student's field performance or professionalism that have not responded to prior remediation efforts, or if there are concerns about opportunities to support students' learning that remediation efforts have not improved. Termination may also occur if a student's behaviors have resulted in a significant violation of the NASW Code of Ethics, agency policy, or state or federal laws. Termination from placement may result in an academic review with the BSW or MSW committees, respectively, in order to make decisions about the student's continuance in the program. Termination from field placement may result in the student receiving a failing grade in the related field experience course. The academic review process for both BSW and MSW students is outlined in the MSW program manual and the BSW Student Handbook.

## **Problem-Solving Phases in Field Education**

We know challenges can arise during field placement experiences and members of the field triad (Student, Field Supervisors, Faculty Field Liaison) may need guidance to help develop a winning situation. The following flowchart outlines the steps Students, Supervisors, and Faculty Field Liaisons should follow when working through a difficult issue. Whether the issue is brought forward by the Student or Field Instructor, all problem solving will start in Phase #1. While we know that some may require more dialogue and input, we always aim to resolve issues early and not reach the later phases of this process. If or when an issue cannot be resolved by working through the process, Phase #5 may involve an Academic Review, placement changes, student not passing the field experience course, and/or other serious actions regarding the student's placement.

