



## Learning Contracts in Social Work Field Education

Presented by the  
Field Education Department

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## Outline

- Introduction: Competencies and Practice Behaviors
- Constructing a Well-Written Learning Contract
- The Role of Supervision
- Evaluation
- Q and A



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## Questions?

Staff in the Field Education Department are available to answer your questions!

Email us at [sw-field@buffalo.edu](mailto:sw-field@buffalo.edu).



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**Introduction: Competencies & Practice Behaviors**

*“In social work, field education is the signature pedagogy.”*

*Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards,  
Council on Social Work Education*

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- Field education is where our profession **socializes students** to perform the role of practitioner.
- Field Education **connects the theoretical and conceptual contribution** of the classroom to the practice setting.
- Field Education is where **competencies are best demonstrated**.

(Excerpted from Accreditation Review Brief, 2008)

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**Field is where competencies are best demonstrated.**

- Field Education becomes increasingly important with the Council on Social Work Education focus on the attainment of competencies.
- **Competency based education** emphasizes the measurement of **skill attainment** as the primary focus of training, and **student readiness for practice** is measured against a set of core competencies.

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## "Anatomy" of a Learning Contract



**Competency #1: Identify as a professional social worker, apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice and conduct oneself accordingly.**

**Practice Behaviors / Expected Outcomes**

- a) Identify and demonstrate the value base of the social work profession, its ethical standards, and relevant laws including the NASW Code of Ethics.
- b) Demonstrate adherence to professional social work roles and their boundaries
- c) Engage in self-reflection and monitoring
- d) Identify professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication
- e) Seek supervisory input and manage authority in relationships in a professional manner to enhance your professional growth and development
- f) Accept constructive criticism from others to enhance social work skills, and to promote professional growth
- g) Identify the importance of self-care in professional social work practice, and develop a self care plan
- h) Identify and manage personal values such that professional values guide practice
- i) Identify means of improving client access to social work services

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- Each individual **competency** is the overarching goal or objective.
- The **practice behaviors** associated with each competency are components, or ingredients.

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**Competence is what students are reaching for.**

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The Learning Contract/Evaluation Form

[Learning Contract Evaluation Form](#)



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The Learning Contract Form

- a) Is developed by the student and educator in partnership.
- b) Ensures that expectations for students are explicit.
- c) Provides criteria for assessment.
- d) Defines the boundaries of what is possible to accomplish in two semesters.



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Faculty Field Liaisons are available to assist!



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## Constructing a Well-Written Learning Contract

- I. Identify student interests and abilities, and areas for professional growth, and align these with agency opportunities.
- II. Keep agency mission, vision, areas of service provision in mind, and consider practicum requirements.

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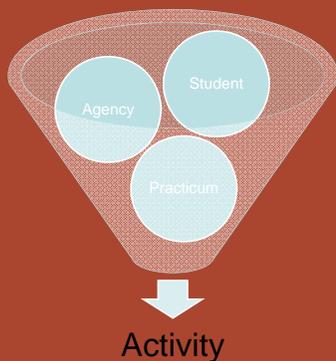
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## Helpful Questions

What specific competencies are required for professionals in my setting?

What competencies would I hope to observe in a well-trained colleague...

...and then,

...what competencies would a student be expected to have developed at the end of their placement?

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### Also, Ask Yourself...

1. How can we individualize and tailor activities to the needs of the community being served?
2. What will I observe the student doing (behavioral-see, hear) once they are competent in an area?



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### Tailoring to the Needs of the Community Being Served

- Can students be compiling a list of community resources for staff use? For consumers?
- Can students extend agency outreach and education efforts?
- Are there policies that can be researched? A literature review on best practices? On available assessment tools?



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### Activities should be *behaviorally explicit*.



- Have to measure and evaluate; How will you know when goals are met?
- What do you see, or hear? What evidence is there that lets you know the student has been successful?



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### Helpful Verbs

- *interview, write, observe, role play, participate, accompany, attend, summarize, co-lead*
- *develop, understand, utilize, be able, distinguish between, interpret, formulate, demonstrate, examine, take initiative*

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### Example:

Student will **co-lead** a social skills group, **demonstrating the ability to engage** effectively with individual group members, **exhibiting positive regard and openness**, and will reflect on progress in **supervision**.

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### Importance of Depth

- Multiple Ingredients (A soufflé versus an omelet)



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### Multiple Ingredients: *Running a Support Group*

- Consider the work a student must do prior, i.e. recruiting participants, obtaining parent permission, practicing associated skills, *...and then*
- Consider also how a student might evaluate their success at the end of a session, or at group termination, i.e. measuring member progress on key indicators, measuring participant satisfaction.



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### *Revised Activity: Multiple Ingredients*

- Student will utilize existing evaluation tools (specify) to assess the effectiveness of a group intervention with students. Individual progress on student goals, and student feedback on process should be considered. A summary of results will be reviewed in supervision.

This revised activity would fit nicely as an activity under Competency 5, "Engage in research informed practice, and practice informed research."



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### The Role of Supervision

- Think about the big picture...not task for "task sake".
- Bring learning contract in to supervision; use it as a reference point.
- Supervision can bring the contract to life.
- Explore how particular skills/ practice behaviors transfer to other settings, i.e. the ability to network.



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### Evaluation (briefly)

- Evaluation is accomplished using the Learning Contract / Evaluation Form
- What will they be able to *do* ...evidence of accomplishment
- Rating descriptions can be found on page 2 of the Learning Contract.



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### Tips & Resources

- [Learning Contracts](#)
- [Web Search of Activities](#)
- [Helpful Definitions & Tips](#)
- Your Field Faculty Liaison is a resource, too!



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### Living Proof.

WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES.



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