

Welcome to Stockton University

Online Seminar in Field Instruction
(SIFI)

UNIT 2: Ethical Conduct

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Function of Supervisory Relationship

One of the most important areas of practice that field instructors discuss with their students is teaching and reinforcing the ethics and values of the social work profession (Reamer, 2012).

- Field instructors help students make connections between the content of the ethical code and real life practice situations.

Function of the Supervisory Relationship

- Students who are new to the field, may have a strong desire to fix things, and their idealism can get in the way as well as be an asset. Students may come across a client situation where there is no clear “right” answer or where none of the choices appear “good.” This can be confusing and challenging for the student.
- In some instances, the *Code of Ethics* may provide clear instruction of the action to be taken. In other cases, the “correct” decision may not be evident, or there may be more than one alternative. Field instructors assist students in thinking through such cases.

Ambiguity

- As social workers we deal with ambiguity on an everyday basis. For students this can be an enormous challenge.
- Kerson (1994) states, “Certain questions have no answers; social workers mediate among the least painful choices for family members and the client. (p.11).
- It is important for field instructors/supervisors to discuss ethical conflicts and the process of resolving dilemmas.

Common Ethical Challenges

- Mandated reporting and responsibilities
- Mental health treatment and involuntary commitment
- Worker-client boundaries
- Disclosure of student status
- Self-disclosure
- Cultural responsiveness

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Mandated Reporting & Responsibilities

Social workers are considered to be “mandated reporters” of suspected abuse and neglect. (In New Jersey, every citizen is a mandated reporter.)

Students are frequently fearful of this responsibility. It is important for the field instructor to discuss in detail with the student the circumstances and the procedures of reporting, as well as the agency’s policy and state laws pertaining to reporting.

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Mental Health & Involuntary Commitment

Field instructors guide students on how to establish rapport and set treatment goals with involuntary clients (corrections, addiction treatment, juvenile justice and residential treatment programs).

- The power dynamic inherent in working with involuntary clients should be explored with students as well as the struggle with the ethical obligation to keep people safe and the right to self-determination.

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Boundaries

- Establishing appropriate professional boundaries is an ethical issue that arises frequently.
- Many times students feel uncomfortable establishing healthy boundaries.
- It is essential for students to recognize the necessity of clear roles in order to protect the safety of the client as well as clarify the expectations in the social worker-client relationship (Hensley, 2016).
- Providing specific examples of potential boundary violations can be helpful in helping students understand how to handle these ethical issues.

Disclosure of Student Status

Field instructors teach students how to tell their clients that they are in training . Students may feel uncomfortable doing this, yet most of time the disclosure is well received. Students should always be forthright about their internship status (NASW, 2008).

The field instructor/supervisor is responsible to ensure that clients are well served and that students have the necessary skills as well as professional support for their learning activities (Hensley, 2016).

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Self-Disclosure

- Some students are quick to use self-disclosure, but they may discover that it frequently does not have the desired effect.
- Helping students learn the appropriate use of self-disclosure is an important role of the field instructor.

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Cultural Responsiveness

- Not only is cultural responsiveness an expectation of the *NASW Code of Ethics* but an essential competency expected of graduates by the standards of our accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education.
- Asking students about the material they have learned in human behavior and social policy courses can help them to make important connections between concepts learned in class about power and privilege, social identity and social justice with real life scenarios in the field (Hensley, 2016).

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NASW Code of Ethics

- Students are expected to adhere to the *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). It is the responsibility of the student to become familiar with the *NASW Code of Ethics* and with its relevance to field education, placement assignments, and procedures.

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Professional Values

- “Values are the ideals and philosophy of a group, the moral and ethical principles that govern the actions of a group, agency or institution” (Kerson,1994, p.11).
- Learning the values of social work as a profession and how to integrate these values into practice are amongst the most important functions of field placement. The field instructor is the one who models and teaches these values, reinforcing what students have learned in the classroom.

Professional Ethics

- Claims or suits that were brought against individual workers for the past 15-year period were most frequently on the following grounds:
 1. Incorrect treatment
 2. Sexual misconduct
 3. Suicide or attempted suicide
 4. Non-sexual dual relationships
 5. The reporting of abuse to authorities

Professional Code of Ethics

All Codes fulfill three main objectives;

1. The educate professionals about sound ethical conduct
2. They provide a mechanism for professional accountability
3. They serve as catalysts for improving practice

(Corey, Schneider & Callanan, 2005)

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Malpractice Defined

Reamer (2012) states that malpractice occurs when:

- A legal duty exists between the client and the social worker
- The social worker is negligent in that duty
- The client suffers harm or injury
- The harm is caused by the social worker's dereliction of duty

Issues of Malpractice

- Failing to meet the professional standards of care that may result in injury to the client
- Failing to act in a competent manner.
- Failing to disclose student status
- Providing treatment without consent
- Keeping inaccurate, false or inadequate records
- Failing to provide proper-established treatment
- Failing to consult with a specialist
- Failure to take action to prevent a client's suicide
- Failing to warn third parties of potential harm
- Failing to seek supervision

Liability Insurance

While in their field placements, students are covered by University malpractice insurance. An agency wishing to have more information about University insurance may obtain it from the Field Coordinator. In addition, students may purchase additional malpractice insurance, which is available to members of the NASW.

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Resources for Direction with your Student

- *NASW Code of Ethics*
<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp>
- The International Federation of Social Workers
Statement of Ethical Principles
<http://ifsw.org/policies/statement-of-ethical-principles/>
- Agency policies and procedures manuals

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