

# Module 9: Resolution of Problems in Fieldwork



***“An Ounce of prevention  
is worth a pound of  
cure” (Benjamin Franklin)***

California State University Los Angeles School of  
Social Work

# Introduction

In most cases, resolution of problems in fieldwork are readily resolved through open dialogue and feedback with the student in weekly individual supervision.

However, for those instances where more structure is needed, the School of Social Work has developed some helpful procedures to assist the student in their learning process, as well as attend to potential liability concerns if the problem persists.

# Introduction

Please refer to the Cal State LA field manual as it will provide additional details about the strength based, problem solving approach we try to bring to any issues or concerns that are brought up in field. The MSW and BASW Field Manuals are provided via PDF to all field instructors and MSW and BASW students at the beginning of the fall semester.

This will better support you to understand the supervisee's right to due process.

# Objectives

- To provide an understanding of the progressive steps involved in resolving a student issue in field.
- To provide an understanding of the outcomes involved in resolving a student issue in field.

# It Takes a Village...

It is incumbent on us as faculty, in collaboration with the field placement agency, the responsibility for determining whether students have demonstrated the required level of skill acquisition and achievement within multiple areas (academic performance, professional behavior, and ethical behavior) sufficient to interact positively with clients, peers, and professionals and practice in field placement

# It Takes a Village...(cont.)

We all collectively have the responsibility to identify students who are not meeting acceptable standards of professional and ethical behavior and seek, when possible, ways to address and resolve identified problems and concerns.

The focus is on adopting progressive steps where all involved have an opportunity to identify, process and problem solve whenever possible

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

- Creating a documentation system for all your student interns that helps you keep track of observed patterns in performance and help in the overall evaluation process at the end of each semester.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

- Identify and address the issue at first sign.
- Early intervention is essential.
- Every effort is made to assure that students' rights to due process are *protected*, as well as *protecting* the interests of the agency and client.



# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

- Allow the student time for corrective action and for resolution.
- Assess recent progress (within 2 weeks) with continued documentation.
- Evaluate response.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

- It is important to remember that you are not alone.
- At this point, as stated in the field manual, the Field Instructor should reach out to the Faculty Liaison to discuss the issue.
- Possible outcomes:
  1. Identified problems are resolved and placement continues.
  2. Identified problem continues and a formal conference is scheduled.
  3. Only in extenuating circumstances will the student be reassigned to a new field agency. The Faculty Liaison will confer with the of the Director of Field Education to approve the replacement.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

- In the case of a formal conference between student, Field Instructor and Faculty Liaison, the following tasks are completed:
  - A. Review identified problems and obstacles to resolution. At this meeting, all parties involved should have an opportunity to review evidence of the student's work in the placement agency, including process recordings, feedback from preceptors and further case documentation, as available.
  - B. During the conference, a Performance Corrective Action Plan may be developed, including a clear statement of the problem areas, remediation steps, expectations for measurable change, a clearly defined evaluation process, a time frame for remediation, and a review of possible outcomes and consequences.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

C. If a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is needed, the Faculty Liaison will create it with the help and support of the field instructor. The goal of the CAP is to support the student in addressing concerns in a proactive manner to ensure success in field.

1. The Faculty Liaison sends a copy to each participant for their signature. These copies are then returned to the Faculty Liaison.

2. The CAP is signed by all participants, and everyone receives a signed copy. This signifies agreement by all three parties to the content and conditions contained in the CAP.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes:

1. Student follows through with corrective action plan resulting in satisfactory completion within the specified time frame. At this point, the corrective action plan is considered complete and becomes a part of the student's fieldwork file.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes (continued):

2. Extenuating circumstances may result in student being reassigned to a new fieldwork agency. The Faculty Liaison in consultation with the Director of Field Education will decide if a reassignment is appropriate. Depending on those circumstances, the new Field Instructor will be informed about the student's strengths and areas needing improvement and the circumstances necessitating the reassignment.

It may be determined that due to the circumstances around the reassignment, the student may need to continue with the corrective action plan. A student may need to complete additional hours in fieldwork when reassignment occurs to provide the necessary orientation and integration to the new agency setting and provide a base for evaluating the student's performance.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes (continued):

3. Student follows through with remediation plan but does not satisfactorily complete terms of the contract. However, Field Instructor and Faculty Liaison agree through evaluation of the student's progress that sufficient progress has been made towards resolution, warranting an extension of the time frame for the corrective action plan.

Extensions are made as an addendum to the CAP and are finalized with the student, Field Instructor, and Faculty Liaison, specifying a time frame for completion of the extension and an evaluation meeting date.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes (continued):

4. Students who must be reassigned to another agency due to issues related to student performance will be given only **one other** field placement opportunity.

5. Student attempts to follow through with corrective action plan but does not show progress or satisfactorily meet the conditions within the specified time frame. Additionally, student does not demonstrate the potential to successfully complete the terms of the corrective action plan. Student is terminated from the placement with a grade of NO CREDIT in fieldwork.



# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes (continued):

6. If the student does not follow through with the corrective action plan and, therefore, does not satisfactorily meet the conditions within the specified time frame, the student is terminated from the placement with a grade of NO CREDIT in fieldwork. (See “Termination from Fieldwork” ).

7. If the student refuses to sign the corrective action plan, the student is terminated from the placement with a grade of NO CREDIT in fieldwork.

# Progressive Steps for Performance Evaluation

## D. Possible Outcomes (continued):

8. Once the student has exhausted these steps, the student can access the school wide grievance procedure, outlined in the CSULA catalogue.

9. If student believes that they have been treated unfairly, the student may follow grievance procedures outlined in the MSW Graduate Handbook.

# Stop and Think

This is not a graded exercise, but please consider processing one of the five vignettes that follows:

1. How would you handle this situation?
2. What would be your first step, second step, etc.?
3. What supervisory tools would you use to take corrective action? To take supportive action?
4. If and when, would you notify the university field liaison?
5. What steps, if anything, would you want the university field liaison to take at this time?

# Understanding Conflict Handling Styles

Behavioral scientists Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, who developed the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, have identified five styles:

1. Competition
2. Collaboration
3. Compromise
4. Avoidance
5. Accommodation

No conflict style is inherently right or wrong, but one or more styles could be inappropriate or ineffective for a given situation.

# 1. Competing

- Value of own issue/goal: High
- Value of relationship: Low
- Result: I win, you lose

Competitors come across as aggressive, autocratic, confrontational, and intimidating. A competitive style is an attempt to gain power and pressure a change. A competitive style can be appropriate when you have to implement an unpopular decision, make a quick decision, the decision is vital in a crisis, or it is important to let others know how important an issue is to you – "standing up for your right." However, relationships are harmed beyond repair and may encourage other parties to use covert methods to get their needs met.

## 2. Accommodating

- Value of own issue/goal: Low
- Value relationship: High
- Result: I lose, you win

Accommodators set aside their own needs because they want to please others in order to keep the peace. Smoothing or harmonizing can result in a false solution to a problem and can create feelings in a person that range from anger to pleasure.

Accommodators are unassertive and cooperative and may play the role of a martyr, complainer, or saboteur. However, accommodation can be useful when one is wrong or when you want to minimize losses to preserve relationships. It can become competitive – "I am nicer than you are" – and may result in reduced creativity and increased power imbalances.

# 3. Avoiding

- Value of own issue/goal: Low
- Value of relationship: Low
- Result: I lose, you lose

Avoiders deliberately ignore or withdraw from a conflict rather than face it. Avoiders do not seem to care about their issue or the issues of others. People who avoid the situation hope the problem will go away, resolve itself without their involvement, or rely on others to take the responsibility.

Avoidance can be appropriate when you need more time to think and process, time constraints demand a delay, or the risk of confrontation is not worth what might be gained. However, avoidance is destructive if the other person perceives that you don't care enough to engage. By not dealing with the conflict, this style allows the conflict to simmer potentially resulting in angry or negative outbursts.

# 4. Compromising

- Value of own issue/goal: Medium
- Value of relationship: Medium
- Result: I win some, you win some

*Compromisors* are willing to sacrifice some of their goals and persuade others to give up theirs too—give a little, get a little. *Compromisors* maintain the relationship and can take less time than other methods, but resolutions focus on demands rather than needs or goals. The compromise is not intended to make all parties happy or find a decision that makes the most sense, but rather ensures something just and equitable even if it causes a loss for both parties. Power is defined by what one part can coerce or get the other to give up. To split the difference game playing can result and the outcome is less creative and ideal.



# 5. Collaborating

- **Value of own issue/goal: High**
- **Value of relationship: High**
- **Result: I win, you win**

Collaboration generates creative solutions that satisfy all the parties' concerns and needs. Collaborators identify the underlying concerns, test assumptions, and understand the views of others. Collaboration takes time and if the relationship among the parties is not important, then it may not be worth the time and energy to create a win-win solution. However, collaboration fosters respect, trust, and builds relationships. Collaborators address the conflict directly and in a way that expresses willingness for all parties to get what they need.

# Understanding Conflict Handling Styles

- In any conflict ask: "Is my preferred conflict handling style the very best I can use to resolve this conflict or solve this problem?"
- Awareness is key—for all involved, especially when it comes to conflict handling styles.
- We are here for you—feel free to reach out to process, discuss, or vent.

Source: Thomas, K. W. and R.H. Kilmann, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Thomas, Kenneth & Kilmann, Ralph. (1976). Thomas-Kilmann conflict MODE instrument. 10.1037/t02326-000.

# Common conflicts (Students/FI's)

- **Lack of motivation:** For students, some are not invested in learning and "*just want to get internship over with*". For FI's they lack interest in guiding, supporting or challenging the student, and instead focus on delegating tasks with little or no supervision.
- **Professionalism (attire/timeliness):** Inappropriate attire (e.g., ill fitting clothes, flip flops, appearing disheveled), arriving late to scheduled appointments or internship.
- **Professional Behavior:** for both students and FI's, a lack of boundaries, indiscriminate self disclosure, overinvolvement in office gossip/politics
- **Communication:** for both students and FI's, communication is vague, inconsistent, and/or unclear. Expectations are not clearly explained (from both student and FI) and consequently are not met causing conflict.

# Takeaways...

- ***Trust your gut:*** If you're noticing questionable behavior and/or communication from your intern, so are others. Don't minimize what you're noticing. If still in doubt, check in with the assigned preceptor or other staff to get a sense if others are noticing the same concerns.

# Takeaways...(cont.)

- **Ask for help:** We cannot say it enough, reach out to us (field liaison). Get ahead of the situation before it escalates to a conflict.
- Progressive steps to problem solving (e.g., making students aware of concerns, understanding all perspectives, and coming up with solutions) only works if you address concerns as they arise, not at the end of the semester when the student does not have the opportunity to improve.

# Resolutions of Problems in Fieldwork

We at CSULA thank you for supporting our students and for working so diligently and skillfully to support their growth and development.

Problems in the field do arise and are best addressed early. Please feel free to contact your student's field liaison whenever there is a concern. They will be happy to work in partnership with you to support the student's growth and development.

# Resolutions of Problems in Fieldwork

Thank You

THE END