

# Interorganizational Relationships Between Schools of Social Work and Field Agencies\*

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## Summary of the Research Study

Field education is a critical component of social work education, particularly in the role it plays in helping students integrate and apply theory, research, and practice knowledge to real world practice situations. University field education programs rely on the voluntary participation of organizations willing to accept students for field education and provide social workers as field instructors (3). This exploratory study sought to identify the significant components of interorganizational relationships between a school of social work and 62 randomly selected field educators. The study examined the relationships between three categories of agencies ("lone ranger", "key contact", and "teaching center") and the university based on a conceptual framework developed from a review of the literature which consisted of four components: 1) commitment to education 2) organizational supports and resources 3) interpersonal relations 4) collaborative and reciprocal activities. Findings revealed that "teaching centers" offered more complex social work student education programs, placed greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships and collaboration, and were engaged in more reciprocal relationships with the university than the "lone ranger" and "key contact" settings.

## Findings

### 1) Commitment to Social Work Education

*The organization's commitment to education was measured by examining the organization's recognition of students, and the value placed on field education as part of the social worker's job.*

- All respondents seemed to value integrating students into the organization
- All settings demonstrated a commitment to education of social work students regardless of their organization's formal or informal agreement with the university
- Lone ranger agencies were most likely to connect students with the head of the agency.
- In teaching centers, the ability to be a field educator was more important as a factor for hiring and promotion and was more often part of the job description than in the other two categories of organizations.

### 2) Organizational Supports and Resources

*The organization's level of support and resources for field education was measured by assessing educational supports and resources for the student program such as time allocated to perform educational coordination, and financial support for education related to field instruction.*

"Lone Ranger" (n=22)	"Key Contact" (n=19)	"Teaching Centre" (n=21)
*Informal relationship	*Semi-formal relationship	*Formal relationship
*One social worker independently volunteers to provide field education	*More than one social worker volunteers to provide field education	*More than one social worker expected to provide field education; educational coordinator appointed
*Annual availability unpredictable	*Annual availability unpredictable	*Annual availability predictable

## Organizational Supports and Resources (cont'd)

- Field educators, regardless of organizational resources, found ways to integrate students into their own existing staff educational programs. However, in teaching centers, most educational coordinators define and develop specific programs to deliver specialized knowledge and competence associated with social work practice. Surprisingly, about one third of educational coordinators indicated that they receive no designated job time for educational coordination and no support to attend and participate in activities with the university.

### 3) Interpersonal Relations

*Interpersonal relations between the organization and the university were measured by examining the relationship between the field instructor and the faculty field liaison and between the school's practicum office and field instructors.*

- The great majority of respondents knew their faculty field liaison. However, there was a significant difference by agency category. The educational coordinators at the teaching centers appeared to have more interpersonal involvement than the other setting representatives.
- Regardless of the type of setting, the field instructors and educational coordinators felt connected to their university counterparts. The majority of respondents believed that the faculty worked hard at communicating with the field; 95% of respondents indicated that they received a speedy response from the practicum office to queries.

### 4) Collaborative Relationships and Reciprocal Activities

*The nature of collaborative relationships and reciprocal activities between the organization and the university was measured by evaluating participation in a range of research, educational, and policy making activities.*

- Representatives from teaching centers were more likely to serve on committees and more likely to plan field education workshops than those from the other types of settings.
- There was no significant difference between category of organization in terms of number of participants who have given lectures at the university and attended colloquia offered at the university.
- Teaching centers were more likely to send social workers to a postgraduate Research Diploma Program offered by the university and more likely to invite faculty members to present on topics of interest.

- Teaching centers were more involved in collaborative and reciprocal activities than other types of settings. This involvement was evident in both field education of students and continuing professional development for social work staff. The teaching center social workers engaged in an ongoing relationship-building process with the university which in turn benefited both parties. Through their participation in these activities they brought practice examples and experience and research challenges to the university.

### Implications for Social Work

- As organizations face fiscal restraints and restructuring, their commitment to social work education is challenged. Individual social workers face greater workload demands and report higher stress. Despite these changes, social workers in teaching centers are still expected by their organizations to participate with the local college or university.
- In the other two types of settings an institutional commitment to providing student education is not apparent. Social workers in these settings provide field education essentially on their own time, and may even have to advocate for the organization to accept a social work student. Although they use fewer university resources, these social workers continue to be resourceful and capitalize on existing educational resources to deliver field education.
- Universities will need to discover additional ways to support organizational sites for field instruction. One strategy may be for universities to link smaller settings with teaching centers not only to provide field education but to collaborate in areas of mutual interest.

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### References

*\*This fact sheet is a summary of the following articles:*

- 1 Bogo, M., & Globerman, J. (1999). Interorganizational relationships between schools of social work and field agencies: Testing a framework for analysis. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 35(2), 265-274.
- 2 Bogo, M., & Globerman, J. (1995). Creating effective university-field partnerships: An analysis of two inter-organization models for field education. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 11(1/2), 177-193.
- 3 Bogo, M., & Power, R. (1992). New field instructors' perceptions of institutional supports for their roles. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 28, 178-189.

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