BW
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CONSULTING

TOOLKIT: GUIDANCE FOR HOSTING A SOCIAL WORK STUDENT IN YOUR LIBRARY

WRITTEN BY:

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INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is created specifically for public library administrators and staff who are considering hosting a social work practicum student in their library. If your library is like many others around the United States (and other countries as well), you are experiencing patron needs related to mental health, homelessness or housing instability, substance use, food insecurity, or other social, psychological, health-related, or poverty-related challenges. There is a growing body of research showing that these patron needs have increased over the past two decades, largely due to structural issues such as stagnant wages, lack of affordable housing, mental health care shortages, and rising costs of living (1), and have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (2). These types of needs often exceed the limits of most library workers' training, cause stress and strain for staff, sometimes cause difficulty with meeting other patron needs, and may raise safety concerns in the library (1). Although the exact type of needs, prevalence and frequency of patrons visiting the library with these needs, and availability of community resources for these patron needs vary between libraries, the data are clear that all libraries are experiencing at least some patrons with high levels of need.

As patron needs have shifted over recent years, many libraries have added or considered social work collaborations. These collaborations include paid social workers on-site in the library, contracts or agreements with social services in the community to use library space to meet with patrons, volunteer social workers, and practicum students. Hosting social work practicum students is often the first step for a library considering on-site social work services, since services are low-cost or free and are offered on a time-limited basis to allow the library to "try out" a social worker. However, many libraries are "reinventing the wheel" due to limited instruction and availability of information and guidance about these types of placements. In this toolkit, you will find information about the types of activities performed in libraries by social work practicum students and gain the tools needed to help you make an informed decision about whether a social work practicum placement is appropriate for your library. You will also learn how to go about initiating the process, supervising the student, and evaluating the placement.

USING THIS TOOLKIT

We have intentionally designed this toolkit to be as user-friendly as possible, and have laid out the sections based on the order that libraries typically need to know each piece of information. At the end, we have included appendices with additional resources and pieces of information, including sample job descriptions, interview questions, learning plan activities, and a glossary of common social work terms. We have also added a one-page summary in Appendix G, and a checklist of things to remember in Appendix H.

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK?

"The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's dual focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.."
--National Association of Social Work, 2021 (3)

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Social work is a broad profession, and although many people think of social workers as child welfare workers or therapists, social workers are employed in many different roles and many different contexts in addition to those two roles. Social workers can be found in community organizations like public libraries as well as schools, healthcare settings, poverty-serving organizations, shelters, substance abuse treatment centers, criminal justice settings, and many others. There is hardly any segment of our society that does not include social workers, since many fields have discovered that social workers are especially adept at assessing situations, identifying strengths, developing plans to overcome individual, group, or community barriers or challenges, building relationships, collaborating across disciplinary lines, and connecting individuals and communities to needed resources. Although some social workers specialize in specific areas of practice or with specific populations, all social workers are initially trained to be "generalist" practitioners, which means they are trained to work with many different populations in a variety of contexts and are prepared to work across what we call the micro-to-macro (individual to community) continuum of services. This is part of what makes social workers or social work students a good fit for a library. Examples of basic micro-to-macro social work services are included on the next page, with specific examples of library-based services included later in this toolkit.

Micro

Micro social work services refer to serving individuals or families, and can include things like conducting assessments, developing treatment plans, providing case management services, offering crisis intervention, assisting with individual skill development, and conducting individual therapy with children, adolescents, or adults. The exact type of micro-focused services offered by a specific social worker will depend on the setting in which they are employed.

Mezzo

Mezzo social work services refer to serving groups of people, and include things like group therapy, facilitating or organizing mutual aid/support groups, providing group training, or facilitating public workshops on specific topics related to mental health, community resources, or education about social service-related needs.

Macro

Macro social work services are any type of social work focused on improving well-being at the large organizational or community levels. These services include conducting needs assessments, leading community coalitions or task forces, working in political or advocacy positions, evaluating program outcomes, looking for and obtaining funding for new community-based interventions, or other types of large-scale programs aimed at improving well-being in a given community.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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Reputable social work programs are accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), meaning that the program's structure and curriculum have been recognized and approved in line with accreditation guidelines for BSW and MSW programs and a degree from that program will be recognized by state licensing authorities. A list of currently accredited Wisconsin social work programs is included in Appendix A.

To meet accreditation requirements for CSWE, social work programs have to ensure that students satisfactorily learn and are able to demonstrate nine social work "competencies," which are skills, values, and knowledge necessary to practice social work in an ethical and professional manner. This means that courses in the social work program are aligned with these competencies, and also means that practicum placements must provide opportunities to practice all nine of them. The most recent set of competencies (from the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, [4]) and a brief description of each one are listed on the following two pages.

REQUIRED COMPETENCIES FOR ALL SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS

1

Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social work students understand the values of the profession, use tools for ethical decision making, demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication, use technology ethically and appropriately, and use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

2

Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social work students understand the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences and engage clients and constituencies as experts on their own experiences. Students understand how oppression and marginalization impact experience. Students practice self-awareness and self-regulation to manage personal biases in working with diverse clients and groups.

3

Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Social work students understand that all people share the same fundamental human rights, and actively engage in practice to advocate for human rights and social, economic, and environmental equity and justice.

4

Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Social work students understand research methods and how to apply these methods to evaluate practice, policies, and services. They also know how to evaluate interventions based on available evidence from multidisciplinary sources.

5

Engage in Policy Practice

Social work students identify policies that impact service delivery and access to resources, and advocate for policies that advance human rights, equity, and justice. They understand how policy impacts human rights and social justice as well as available services and service access. They understand their role in policy development and implementation.

6

Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students value human relationships, and use relational skills to effectively engage with clients or systems at all levels of micro-to-macro practice

7

Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students apply critical thinking and theory to assess clients and systems at all levels of micro-to-macro practice, and use assessment information to develop collaborative goals and guide interventions. They understand assessment methods and how to use them with diverse groups of people, organizations, and communities.

8

Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students apply theory and knowledge of various practice techniques at the micro-to-macro levels to implement evidence-based interventions, work collaboratively towards desired outcomes, and advocate for and empower clients.

9

Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Social work students use appropriate research methods to evaluate interventions, outcomes, and program processes and apply findings to improve effectiveness at all levels of practice.

More details about each competency can be found in the full 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards document (4) if more information is desired about the competencies and how they are defined. Individual programs may add additional competencies, but these nine are required at minimum. The library administrator who initiates the field placement should discuss any additional competencies with the social work program's field coordinator to ensure they can be demonstrated within the library context.

Please note that the social work competencies are scheduled to be updated later in 2022, which means that all accredited programs will be updating their programs accordingly over the next few years. Current standards and competencies can always be located on the main CSWE website under "accreditation."

Although the above competencies are consistent across both BSW and MSW programs, they look a little different at each level of education. All BSW programs are considered generalist programs, which prepare students to use a variety of basic interventions with many different populations, in many settings, and with different areas of focus. MSW programs are required to also prepare students for generalist work, but must build on the competencies above to either prepare students for more advanced levels of work or for working with specific types of populations or areas of practice. For example, some MSW programs are considered "advanced generalist," which means they teach the nine competencies above but at a deeper level so students learn more advanced assessment, intervention, and evaluation skills. Other MSW programs might have special areas of focus, such as clinical or macro-focused practice, or working with specific populations, such as children, families, people with substance use disorders, etc.

For libraries without an on-site social worker, MSW students are recommended because of the high level of independence required in a library-based practicum. BSW students may need an environment where they have more direct supervision or where they are part of a practicum team that includes graduate students.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FIELD PLACEMENTS IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Field education is considered the "signature pedagogy" of social work education by CSWE (4). It is an essential component of the educational process of a social worker since it is the opportunity for students to integrate theory and conceptual knowledge learned in the classroom with real-world experiences working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Because of the importance of field education, CSWE requires that undergraduate students spend a minimum of 400 hours in field as part of a BSW program, and graduate students spend a minimum of 900 hours in field placement. The MSW field placement hours are typically split between two different field placements, one at the foundation or generalist level of their MSW education, and one at the advanced or specialist level. Individual programs may require additional hours, and the exact number of hours per practicum may vary as long as the program meets the overall hour requirements at each level. An exception to the number of hours at the graduate level is for "advanced standing" MSW students, which are students who completed a BSW in social work; these students do not have to complete the full 900 hours in field at the MSW level because of experiences gained in their BSW field practicum. Libraries should reach out to the field coordinator/director at the specific social work program to find out exactly how many hours are required for a student who might be placed in a library-based placement.

What Activities Can Social Work Students Do in Libraries?

As described in the previous sections, social work is a broad profession and students are able to do a variety of activities at the individual, group, organizational, and/or community levels. Although this is one of the benefits of collaborating with a social worker, it can also be overwhelming for libraries that don't know exactly where to start or what types of student activities would be most helpful. Students will need to do activities in the library that address all nine of the social work competencies, and most students need to gain some experience with tasks at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels while in their practicum placement. However, you can determine whether there's a primary focus for your library based on your patron, staff, and community needs. Some social work students focus primarily on individual patron needs and providing referrals and information. Others may focus on needs assessments, building community collaborations, or planning and facilitating training opportunities for staff.

According to Aykanian et al. (5), common library-based social work student activities fall under five basic categories:

1. Assessment, case management, and referrals
2. Community engagement and identifying community-wide gaps/needs
3. Program enhancement or development
4. Targeted community outreach
5. Facilitating mutual aid/support groups

More details of common micro-to-macro library-based social work student activities from the literature (5-7) are included on the following page.

Examples of Library-Based Student Activities

Micro-level library social work includes having students focus on individual patrons by conducting assessments, making referrals, connecting patrons to resources, assisting with applications for public benefits, helping patrons access emergency housing (if available in the community), or providing individual-level advocacy services to attempt to help patrons access needed services.

Micro

Mezzo-level library social work is social work focused on small groups. Examples of mezzo-level social work student activities in the library include facilitating book groups on books related to psychosocial needs, facilitating or convening non-clinical support or mutual-aid groups for various psychosocial needs, or providing information sessions or other programming focused on psychosocial need-related topics such as community resources, recognizing and seeking assistance for mental health problems, substance use, or intimate partner violence.

Mezzo

Macro-level library social work is social work focused on organizational or community-level services. At the macro level of social work services, library-based social work students can conduct needs assessments, sometimes focused on specific populations that access library services, or community-based assessments to identify gaps and needed resources. Macro-focused social work students can help the overall organization by developing additional community partnerships to address staff and patron needs, or participating in or convening task forces/advisory groups to address gaps in community services and assist with collaboratively planning community-level changes. Social work students at the macro level can assist with identifying strategies to help increase the capacity of library staff to meet patron needs. They can also analyze policies for disproportionate impact on specific patron groups or otherwise assist library administrators with ensuring that library services are as equitable as possible while also maintaining behavioral standards.

Macro

Hosting a Social Work Student in Your Library

Initiating the Placement

The first step for hosting a social work student is to directly reach out to a local school of social work to express interest. A list of accredited social work programs in Wisconsin at the time of the creation of this toolkit (June 2022) can be found in Appendix A.

To determine who to contact, look at the program's website to identify someone with the title of "field director" or "field coordinator." This is the person in the social work program whose responsibility it is to manage and oversee the field program component of the student's educational experience. If it is not clear who is in that role, reach out to the BSW program director/coordinator, MSW program director/coordinator, or the program's overall director or dean and request to speak with someone about becoming an approved field placement organization.

Once speaking to the correct person, you should explain the types of activities you are hoping can be completed by a student and should request the level of student (BSW or MSW) you prefer. For libraries without an on-site social worker, it is recommended that a generalist or advanced-level MSW student be requested if possible. This is because of the high level of independence that will be required of a student without an on-site social work supervisor. In this conversation, it is important that you ensure the field director/coordinator understands the types of issues and challenges faced by your library that you are hoping a social work student can address. The general public, including social work educators, often have little understanding of the prevalence of library patrons with high-level psychosocial needs. Without an adequate understanding of your library's needs, the field director/coordinator might inadvertently select students for your placement that could be a poor fit or do not have the experience necessary to function relatively independently in the placement.

The field director/coordinator will inform your library of the timeline for the field placement process at their program, the likelihood that they will have students appropriate for your library-based placement, the requirements of your library to be accepted as a field site, and the process they use for selecting and approving students including any requirements for background checks, etc. They will also inform you of the legal affiliation agreement process, which is discussed further below.

Legal Affiliation Agreement

The collaborating school of social work will need to negotiate a legal affiliation agreement with your library prior to the student being placed there. This is an agreement which serves as a memorandum of agreement/understanding (MOA/MOU) and details the library's expectations and requirements, the university's expectations and requirements, and the legal responsibilities of all parties. Most universities have a template that must be used for this process, although it is often created for clinical environments and needs to be edited to meet the needs of a non-clinical organization like a public library. The process of negotiating this agreement can sometimes take weeks or months to negotiate and sign, depending on the size of the university and library. Large, complex universities often have lengthy review processes, although smaller universities and small libraries can often work quicker and be more nimble. Start this process early, and know that you should not expect to have a student placed in your library until after this agreement is finalized. The field director/coordinator will arrange for the initial copy of the draft affiliation agreement to be sent to you to begin this negotiation process. Although the language of these agreement is quite formal, do not be afraid to ask questions or negotiate the terms of the agreement so it is adequate for your library.

Preparing for the Student

Preparing Staff

It's important that staff are on board with the addition of a social work student in the library prior to someone being placed and beginning their practicum. It is recommended that administrators start talking with staff early to build consensus around the importance of adding this service and to obtain input about what types of activities would be most helpful. Acknowledge the reasons why this practicum is desired and help staff understand the purpose of the student being placed in the library. Share examples of library and social work collaborations so staff understand this is not meant to be a clinical service or duplicate existing community resources. Some staff feel conflicted about whether social work services should be offered in the library and it is important to listen to these concerns and address them prior to moving forward with hosting a social work student. If these concerns are not addressed in advance, the student can be inadvertently caught in the middle of this conflict once at the library. To address these concerns, it is often helpful for staff to see successful social work and library collaborations, learn more about how these collaborations are able to work in other libraries, and understand gaps in services in the community which explain why patrons have unmet needs and could be helped by a social work student at the library. Some resources that could be helpful for this process can be found in Appendix D.

After obtaining staff buy-in, it is essential to clarify the role of the student and specifically discuss your expectations for what they will and will not do (after ideally discussing this with the field director/coordinator). Without this being clarified, some staff have mistaken assumptions about the role of the student or confusion about when they should or shouldn't refer a patron to the student. See below for some examples of common misconceptions.

To increase chances of success for the practicum placement, a single point of contact should be identified for the student while in the library. This person will become the Task Instructor/Supervisor. This step is important because the student will have many interactions with staff who sometimes have conflicting ideas of what activities should be priorities for the student. A single point of contact in the library helps with problem-solving and prioritizing activities as needed.

Common Staff Misconceptions About a Social Work Student

| Misconception	Appropriate Expectation
Once the social work student starts, there will be no more patrons experiencing homelessness because they'll all have housing	The student can share resources with patrons experiencing homelessness, but there are not adequate housing resources to meet the need and people have a right to decide for themselves whether or not they will access available resources
The social work student can provide security for the library	Social workers may model and provide training for staff on de-escalation tactics, but they are not trained in security and should not be placed in that role
Staff can send all "problem patrons" to the social work student so that person can handle all of their needs	Patrons may be referred to the social work student when they need connected with resources or offered assistance, but staff should still fulfill their normal job responsibilities with patrons
The social work student can fill in for other library staff as needed	The social work student can support library staff by providing social work services to patrons, but they should not be used to cover other library responsibilities.
Hosting a social work student is the same as having a paid social worker in the library	The social work student is still learning and cannot work independently. They will need to consult with their social work supervisor frequently and are still learning social work skills.

Defining the Student's Role

Identifying a focus and having a clear vision of what you want to see happen in the practicum will help you define the role of the student and their primary level of practice (micro, mezzo, or macro). Clear communication about expectations is essential for success of the program and should be consistent through preparation of staff, the student interview, orientation, and supervision of the student.

It is important to be realistic about what one part-time social work student can accomplish when there are many possibilities the library might like to explore. The student should not be assigned jobs related to the general operation of the library or to fill the role of regular library staff. If the library is unsure if they have enough social work activities for the student to do, they might consider a shared practicum with another city department or local nonprofit organization.

In many cases, the initial practicum student is one that is macro-focused and whose role might include conducting a needs assessment and assisting with many of the other tasks outlined in this toolkit. In other cases, the library may have completed a needs assessment already or might have specific tasks in mind for the student. A sample generalist student job description and a sample macro-focused job description are included in Appendix B.

Determining Logistics

Logistical needs, including space for the student to work and access to a phone and computer, should be discussed with the field director/coordinator before the student placement begins. The specific needs will vary depending on the type of work assigned to the student. If the student will meet with library patrons, a space that protects privacy yet minimizes risks is required. The identified space should prevent others from hearing confidential conversations but also allow the student to exit the space or obtain assistance quickly if needed.
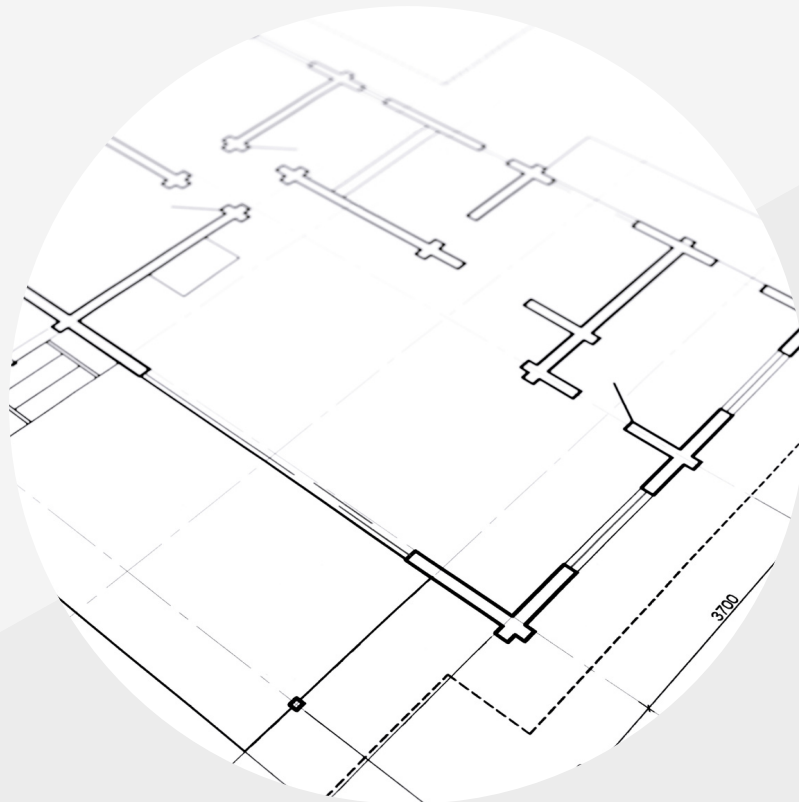
Developing a plan and determining a location for record keeping is an important consideration that can be a challenge due to differences between librarianship and social work practice. Although libraries typically prohibit maintaining records with personal patron information, social work students will be required to keep at least minimal records of any work they do with particular patrons. Early planning and consultation with the social work field director/coordinator can produce creative solutions that align with library policy, social work requirements, and legal requirements.

Selecting the Student

The social work program's field director/coordinator will inform the library about the program's placement process and timeline. Students are typically pre-screened by the social work program in the semester or two prior to the start of the placement, appropriate student resumes forwarded to the library, and then the library is responsible for reviewing resumes and interviewing students to make their selection.

The library should plan to use a formal interview process with prospective students. In this interview, the library might consider including a variety of staff who are familiar with patron needs and could also invite community partners that collaborate with the library and work in social services.

Choosing the best social work student for the library is difficult for library workers, since most library workers are not closely familiar with what qualities make the best social worker. If there are opportunities to include social service providers who understand both social work and library needs, that is ideal. If there is no closely collaborating social services organization, then the library should consider the following as preferred criteria:

- Prior work experience with poverty, mental health, substance use, homelessness, or case management
- At least some knowledge of community resources
- A demonstrated ability to work relatively independently and think on their feet
- A desire to work with a wide range of people
- Excitement at the thought of program development (if they're going to be the initial practicum student placed at the library)
- Good communication skills

Keep in mind that it is better to have no student at all than one who is a poor fit for a library placement or who needs close supervision.

During the interview, the library representatives should ask questions that help to understand the student's abilities and experiences in the above areas. The library representatives should be open about the issues causing current struggles or difficulties at the library that they hope can be addressed by a social work student. They should discuss their mission and values and ask students to consider how social work activities might look in the context of that mission. Students should clearly be told that this is a nonclinical placement in which they will gain experience with a wide variety of people and a wide variety of concerns/issues, but will not involve therapy or diagnosis. Sample interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Orienting the Student

Students need time to become familiar with the library's mission and values and to understand their role in the library. Share your library's mission statement and the reasons why you decided to host a social work student. Students should review the ALA Code of Ethics and compare to their own social work (NASW) Code of Ethics (3). Be sure and orient the student to the library culture, discuss your library's core values, and review and discuss the background of library policies and procedures. Sharing annual reports and community data can also be helpful to the student.

Meet with the student's social work supervisor to coordinate orientation and plan ongoing supervision of the student. Ask students to read literature from the growing number of publications on social work in the library. Students should not work directly with patrons until you are sure they understand how their role fits in the library context.

Helpful orientation materials are included in Appendix D.

Towards the beginning of the practicum, the student will be required to develop a learning contract/plan that outlines goals, activities, and methods of evaluating progress for all nine areas of competency while in the field placement. This plan will be negotiated with the student, their library supervisor, and their social work supervisor, and is a living document that can be adapted to meet the needs of the placement, the student, and the social work program. The form will look different for each social work program, and might have a slightly different name, although the nine competencies will be clearly listed on the learning contract document for all programs. This document will always be used to identify and track the student's goals during the placement and to evaluate the student's performance during the time they are in placement.

For generalist placements like the library, students will need to consider applicable activities they can do at the micro (individual), mezzo (group), and macro (organizational or community) levels. The library supervisor should be prepared to help guide the student to think about appropriate library-based activities they could do that would help address each area of competency. Activities can sometimes count for more than one competency. In addition, students and their supervisors will be asked to evaluate the student's progress on these competencies using the learning contract/plan at several points throughout the practicum placement. It is important that this document be thoroughly planned with feedback from the library supervisor to ensure student activities fit the desired plan of the library and stay within the mission/scope of the library's services while also satisfactorily allowing the student to learn and demonstrate their social work competencies. Sample activities for the learning contract/plan can be found in Appendix E.

Supervising the Student

It is important to remember that social work students are not yet professional social workers and therefore cannot work independently while in the library placement. A library will not get the same level of social work services offered by a student as they would get from a more experienced social worker. Because a practicum placement is a learning experience, students are required to be supervised during the experience to help guide their professional development, ensure they gain appropriate knowledge and skills, and to provide training, education, problem-solving, support, and correction throughout the placement as needed. In organizations with an on-site social worker, that person provides the supervision. However, most libraries do not have on-staff social workers. If there is no social worker employed by the library, students will be required to have two supervisors during the practicum placement- 1) a qualified social work supervisor, referred to as the "field instructor" or "field supervisor," and 2) a person inside the library who collaborates with the field instructor/supervisor to guide the student's day-to-day activities in the library and ensure a high quality learning experience, referred to as the "task instructor" or "task supervisor."
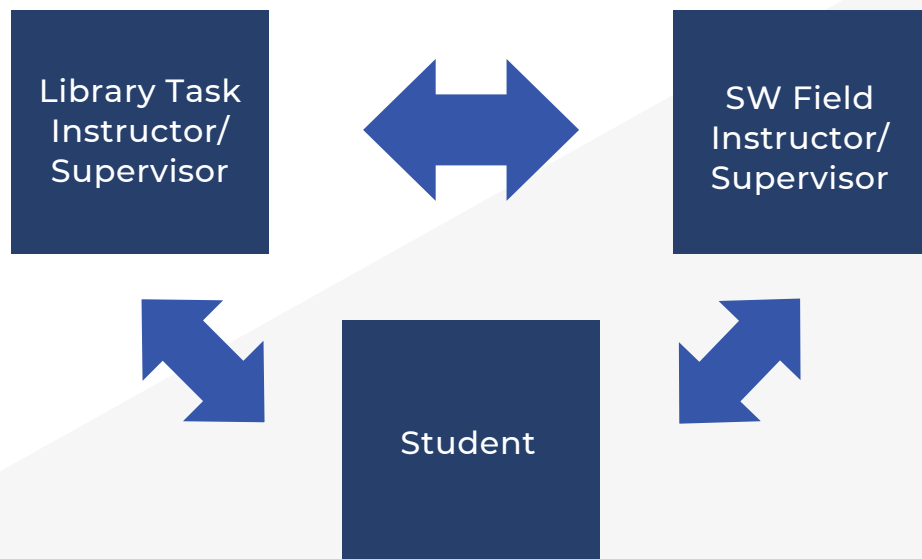
It is essential that these supervisors communicate closely with one another to ensure the student learns necessary social work skills while remaining within the mission, scope, and guidelines of the public library. Although the social work field instructor/supervisor will be the expert on social work skills, the library task instructor should keep in mind that they are an integral part of the student's supervision because they are the experts on the library. In situations where students have struggled or the library is dissatisfied with the student's progress, it is often the case that there was little to no communication between the two supervisors during the placement. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of the two supervisors working as a collaborative team to guide the student and increase the likelihood of a satisfactory field placement for all parties.

Evaluating the Placement

A library-based social work field placement should benefit the patrons, the library, and the student. All schools of social work will have a process in place for evaluating the individual student, and students will be evaluated on their progress using their individual learning plan/contract. It is essential that the library supervisor provides consistent, honest feedback about the student's performance during the placement so the student can grow in their skills and continue to improve their performance. There is typically a mid-point evaluation halfway through the practicum and a final evaluation, but ongoing feedback is welcome and encouraged throughout the student's time in your library.

Separate from the student's individual performance, the library should also consider developing metrics for determining the overall benefit of having student placements in your library and to justify hosting future social work students. Common metrics include outputs (number of patrons served, referrals made, or staff workshops offered) or outcomes (patron satisfaction with services or reduction in overall needs). When developing these metrics, be intentional about having reasonable expectations for what a student placement can accomplish, especially if this is the very first social work student your library has hosted.

At the time of the creation of this toolkit (June 2022), the list below included all CSWE-accredited social work BSW and MSW programs in the state of Wisconsin and their contact information. If available, the specific contact information for the field office is included. If unavailable, we have included the main contact information for the school administration.

To see an updated list of accredited programs, please check the CSWE directory.

Schools offering both BSW & MSW programs:

Concordia University
Mequon, Wisconsin
School of Health Professions
(262) 243-5700
social.work@cuw.edu

University of Wisconsin - Green Bay
Green Bay, WI
UWGB Social Work Professional Programs
Phone: (920) 465-2049
socialwork@uwgb.edu

University of Wisconsin - Madison
Madison, WI
Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work
Phone: (608) 263-3660
Field Office: (608) 263-4813
website@socwork.wisc.edu

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI
Helen Bader School of Social Welfare
Phone: (414) 229-4852
Field Office: (414) 367-9515
hbssw@uwn.edu

University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI
Department of Social Work
Phone: (920) 424-1419
socialwork@uwosh.edu

University of Wisconsin - Whitewater
Whitewater, WI
Department of Social Work
Phone: (262) 472-1137
sw-office@uww.edu

Schools offering only a BSW program:

Carthage College
Kenosha, WI
Social Work Department
Phone (262) 551-8500

Marian University
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin
Bachelor of Social Work Program
Phone (920) 923-7650

Mount Mary University
Milwaukee, WI
Social Work Program
Phone: (414) 930-3000

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI
Social Work Department
Phone: (715) 836-4435
socialwork@uwec.edu

University of Wisconsin – River Falls
River Falls, WI
Social Work Program
Phone: (715) 425-3911

University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI
Department of Sociology and Social Work
Phone: (715) 346-2883
Sociology.and.Social.Work.Department@uwsp.edu

University of Wisconsin – Superior
Superior, WI
Social Work Program
Phone: (715) 394-8101

Viterbo University
La Crosse, WI
Social Work Program
Phone: (608) 796-3000
Communication@viterbo.edu

Generalist Job Description:

Student will:
- Identify library patrons who may benefit from social service support through outreach, direct observation, or referral by library staff
- Meet individually with library patrons in order to provide referral services or address issues in ways that are consistent with the mission, services, and constraints of the library
- Assess patrons' identified needs including those related to housing, mental health, primary care, substance abuse, etc.
- Provide current and relevant information, support, referrals, and assistance to patrons experiencing mental health issues, substance abuse, unstable housing, or other needs as identified
- Provide short-term case management for library patrons who need assistance connecting with other community resources for ongoing services
- Coach, model, and serve as a resource for staff re: best practices related to working with vulnerable populations and customers
- Provide training to staff on trauma-informed care
- Provide crisis assistance and intervention in the library as needed
- Develop partnerships with area agencies and stakeholders in order to provide services within the library or make referrals to off-site services available to library patrons
- Participate in community engagement and outreach, and assist in community-based initiatives

Macro Job Description:

This practicum placement is the initial placement for the library, and student will work with the social work field instructor and library task instructor to help determine the library's and community's needs and lay the foundation for future potential social work and public library practicum placements or collaborations by:
- Conducting a needs assessment of staff to understand staff concerns with meeting patron needs, their perception of patrons' unmet needs, training needs, and ideas for improvement
- Conducting a needs assessment with library patrons to understand patrons' unmet needs and how the library might be able to use a social work collaboration in the future to meet these needs
- Conducting a gap analysis of the community to understand services provided and existing gaps in community resources that could inform the library's future programs
- Preparing a literature review of existing social work and public library collaborations to inform the library about future possibilities of library-based social service programming and services
- Reviewing library policies and making recommendations for improvement to ensure policies are patron-centered and equitable for patrons with financial barriers or other unmet needs
- Developing partnerships with area agencies and stakeholders in order to solicit other organizations and new collaborations to provide needed services within the library
- Participating in community engagement and outreach, community task force meetings, and assisting in other community-based initiatives as needed

Interview questions should be tailored or selected for the specific practicum placement job description, or edited as needed to fit the specific needs of the library.

Sample questions include:

- What interests you in a library-based practicum placement?
- How familiar are you with the library's mission?
- *Explain mission if needed, then ask-* How do you think you, as an aspiring social worker, can help complement this mission?
- Are you familiar with issues faced by libraries re*:* patron psychosocial needs? *If not, explain some of the things the library has experienced with patrons.*
- Tell us about any prior experience you have with:
  - Case management
  - People living in poverty
  - People with severe or chronic mental illness
  - People with substance use disorders
- How familiar are you with community resources for poverty, mental illness, or substance use disorders? Do you have any existing relationships with community providers of these services?
- What experience do you have with de-escalation techniques?
- Tell us about a time you've had to think quickly on your feet.
- Describe a situation in which you had to respond to an urgent or time-sensitive issue without someone else telling you what to do.
- Do you have experience with program development? If so, tell us about this experience.
- Tell us about your experience with needs assessments. If we asked you to do a needs assessment of staff or patron needs, what steps would you take to get this done?
- What kind of supervisor do you hope to have? What is important to you in a supervisor?
- Describe a team experience when you encountered conflict. How did you address it?
- Tell us about your experience working independently with minimal direct supervision.
- Tell us about an experience you've had working with someone very different from you, or someone with different values or expectations, to complete a task.
- Describe a team experience in which you encountered conflict. How did you address it to support the work of the team?
- Tell us about a time you've had to have a difficult conversation with someone.

These are helpful resources for students to read/view during their orientation period, and will help familiarize students with the field of library social work. Some resources may also be helpful to prepare staff and familiarize them with the topic prior to hosting a social work student in the library.

Codes of Ethics

American Library Association Code of Ethics
National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics

Websites

Social Work Interest Group - Public Library Association
Social Work Students & Public Libraries
Whole Person Librarianship

News Stories

Librarians Facing New Tasks Say Crisis Isn't in the Catalog

Library Social Worker Helps Homeless Seeking Quiet Refuge

Looking for Housing or Affordable Healthcare? Your Local Library is Here to Help

More Libraries Hiring Social Workers to Help Those in Need

Public Libraries Add Social Workers and Social Programs

Why Your Local Library Might be Hiring a Social Worker

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

(Although some of these articles are behind a paywall, a student is likely able to access them through their academic library. Others are open access.)

The Changing Role of Libraries: How Social Workers Can Help

Innovative Social Work Field Placements in Public Libraries

Library-Based Field Placements: Meeting the Diverse Needs of Patrons, Including Those Experiencing Homelessness

Library Patrons' Psychosocial Needs: Perceptions of Need and Reasons for Accessing Social Work Services

The Public Library as a Protective Factor: An Introduction to Library Social Work

Social Workers and Public Libraries

Webinars

Library Patrons' Psychosocial Needs: How Social Work Collaborations Can Help

Social Work in Rural and Small Libraries

Social Work Students and Public Library Partnerships

Additional Resources

Guidance for Social Work Positions at the Library

Libraries and Social Workers – Perfect Partners

Social Workers and Librarians- A Case for Why We are BFFs

Social Workers in Public Libraries

Below are some sample activities students can do to address the nine required social work competencies. These are just examples, and you will collaborate with the student and their social work supervisor during the development of the student's learning plan/contract. They or you may have many other suggested activities that would satisfactorily address the social work competencies.

Competency #1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

- Compare the NASW Code of Ethics with the ALA Code of Ethics and identify potential conflicts between the two when practicing social work in a library setting
- Identify an ethical dilemma in your practice at the library and apply an ethical decision-making model to reach a conclusion
- Complete a process recording of a meeting with a patron, identify personal biases that could impact your relationship with the patron, and discuss in supervision with your field instructor

Competency #2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

- Identify factors impacting patron access to community resources and services, specifically focusing on factors impacting vulnerability and oppression in your local community
- Conduct a diversity audit on behalf of the library
- Conduct focus group with a specific group of vulnerable patrons to discuss their perception of library services and identify specific programming that might be helpful for them

Competency #3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

- Discuss specific client populations in supervision to explore practice opportunities for social, economic, and environmental justice for these groups
- Create programming specifically to meet the needs of patrons experiencing homelessness
- Gather literature on the impact of fine-free policies on patrons experiencing economic barriers

Competency #4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

- Conduct a needs assessment of library staff and patrons to determine future directions for the social work practicum program in the library
- Conduct a literature review on best practices for working with people experiencing substance use disorders
- Conduct research and practice using evidence-based brief intervention techniques with three library patrons experiencing mental health challenges

Competency #5: Engage in Policy Practice

- Review library policy with the task instructor and look for specific policies that might inadvertently disadvantage some patrons over others, brainstorm and suggest policy revisions that could impact equity
- Assist with voter registration in the library
- Identify policies at the state or local level that impact service delivery to disadvantaged, oppressed, or vulnerable library patrons

Competency #6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- Develop outreach procedures to provide guidance for future and current social work students to engage with a variety of library patrons
- Identify cultural factors that potentially impact engagement with library patrons and discuss in supervision
- Attend local city council or school board meetings to better understand the needs of the community and how the library might engage with constituents around those areas of need

Competency #7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- Develop an intake and assessment tool that can be used for future and current social work students to identify patron needs
- Develop a needs assessment of library staff to determine priorities for training and development
- Develop mutually agreed-upon plans with at least three patrons for goals of their choice and ensure plans are guided by intake and assessment information

Competency #8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- Conduct de-escalation training for library staff and work with library team to develop a plan for continued practice and evaluation of skills
- Document referrals and brief intervention strategies used with at least three patrons and discuss in supervision to ensure intervention strategies are derived from assessment information
- Design library programming to meet the identified needs of a specific library patron population, ensuring the programming is guided by needs assessment or other external information gathered

Competency #9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- Develop a survey instrument to evaluate the impact of library programming
- Use assessment information to inform and make recommendations about potential changes to future social service programming in the library
- Compile needs assessment data and present findings and recommendations to library administration and board members

<u>Advocacy</u> Representing others individually or in groups in order to advance their cause

<u>Assessment</u> The process of examining a problem to determine its cause, severity, and course which is necessary to design an effective intervention plan

<u>Capacity building</u> Process of developing the abilities, attributes, resources and will to set and reach goals by a client, group, organization, or community

<u>Case management</u> Securing, implementing, and monitoring services needed by a client on an ongoing basis

<u>Competency</u> The specific knowledge, skills, and values necessary for ethical and competent social work practice

<u>Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)</u> The accrediting body for BSW and MSW programs in the United States

<u>Direct practice</u> Social work practice that involves direct contact with clients

<u>Engagement</u> Engaging in and building a professional relationship with a client or system which sets a foundation for subsequent phases of collaborative work

<u>Ethical dilemma</u> A situation in which two strongly held values are in conflict, and in which action to support one value violates the other

<u>Field Director/Coordinator</u> The faculty member responsible for administration of the field/practicum program

<u>Field Instructor/Supervisor</u> The social worker assigned to provide the supervision of a practicum student and to evaluate student performance

<u>Fields of practice</u> The range of social work practice arenas and settings, each of which require specific knowledge and techniques

<u>Generalist</u> A social worker who possesses a broad range of knowledge and skills for work in various fields of practice, who can move from one level of practice to another as needed, draws from a variety of theories and perspectives, and uses a variety of models and techniques in interventions

<u>Indirect practice</u> Social work practice that does not include direct contact with clients, but that impacts them through research, program development, administration, and policy practice

This glossary is adapted from the <u>Dictionary of Social Work from the University of Montana</u> (8)

Intervention The overall term used to describe all change-focused activities performed by social workers on behalf of and in collaboration with their clients, including activities at micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice

Learning plan/contract The document required by social work programs, and developed by the student in collaboration with their supervisors, that details the agreed-upon goals and activities of the student in their practicum placement and ensures the placement will meet the CSWE required competencies

Levels of practice The term that refers to the micro, mezzo, or macro areas of social work practice

Macro The level of social work practice on behalf of and in collaboration with communities and organizations

Mezzo The level of social work practice on behalf of and in collaboration with groups

Micro The level of social work practice on behalf of and in collaboration with individuals

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) The professional association of social workers in the United States

NASW Code of Ethics The written guide for ethical behavior for social workers, published by the National Association of Social Workers.

Needs assessment The process of identifying certain needs and resources of a population or community, combined with the opportunities and challenges for meeting those needs

Presenting problem The issues, problems, or challenges which are seen by the client or referral source as in need of intervention, and which provide a starting point for social work assessment

Self-determination A social work ethical principle that protects and ensures a client's right to make decisions on one's own behalf

Social justice A social work principle that involves ensuring everyone the same basic rights, protections and opportunities and addressing inequalities and injustices in order to eliminate oppression and unequal treatment

Strengths perspective The professional lens that helps social workers maintain a focus on the strengths and resources of clients and client systems upon which to build interventions

Task instructor/supervisor The person inside the organization assigned to work with the student on a day-to-day basis when there is no qualified social work supervisor in the organization

So You Want To Host A Social Work Student In Your Local Library?

Plan In Advance

The collaborating school of social work will need to negotiate a legal affiliation agreement with your library prior to the student being placed there. This sometimes takes weeks or months to negotiate and sign, depending on the size of the university and library. Start early!

Prepare Staff

It's important that staff are on board with the addition of a social work student in the library. Start talking with staff early to build consensus around the importance of adding this service. Acknowledge the reasons why this practicum is desired and help staff understand the purpose of the student being placed in the library. Share examples of library and social work collaborations so staff understand this is not meant to be a clinical service or duplicate existing community resources.

Interview Students

The ideal library-based social work student is one who has had prior work experience with poverty, mental health, substance use, homelessness, or case management and has knowledge of community resources. Students should be able to work relatively independently, think on their feet, be comfortable serving a wide range of people, and be excited by the thought of program development. It is better to have no student at all than one who is a poor fit for a library placement or who needs close supervision.

Provide Ongoing Supervision

Remember that the student is still learning! Hosting a social work practicum student is not the same as having a paid social worker on staff. The student will need ongoing supervision with both their assigned library and social work supervisors throughout the practicum placement. They cannot independently handle a crisis situation and will need support. Be sure to identify a single library supervisor since they may have multiple staff giving them direction. That supervisor should collaborate and coordinate supervision with the social work supervisor to ensure consistent messaging and support for the student.

Choose a Focus

Social work students are able to work at the individual, group, organizational, and/or community levels. Most students need to gain some experience with tasks at all of those levels while in their practicum placement. However, you can determine whether there's a primary focus for your library based on your patron, staff, and community needs. Some social work students focus primarily on individual patron needs and providing referrals and information. Others may focus on needs assessments, building community collaborations, or planning and facilitating training opportunities for staff.

Plan Logistics

It is best if details are planned before the student begins, especially for students who will focus largely on serving individual patrons. They will need a private space to meet with patrons, but be sure it is not too secluded so they can call for someone and access help if needed. One of the more complicated aspects of a social work practicum to plan is how students will be able to maintain and store confidential records. Work with your legal advisors and the school of social work to anticipate and plan for this in advance.

Orient the Student to the Library

Students need time to become familiar with the library's mission and values and to understand their role in the library. Coordinate with the student's social work supervisor to ensure the student understands how social work practice looks in a library environment. Have them read literature from the growing number of publications on social work in the library. Students should not work directly with patrons until you are sure they understand how their role fits in the library context.

Evaluate Success

A placement should benefit the patrons, the library, and the student. Be sure to work with the student to provide feedback about their progress on the goals you mutually planned with them. Develop metrics for determining benefit to your library and to justify future student placements. Common metrics include outputs (number of patrons served, referrals made, or staff workshops offered) or outcomes (patron satisfaction with services or reduction in overall needs).

ADAPTED FROM WAHLER, E. A., RESSLER, J. D., JOHNSON, S. C., RORTVEDT, C., SAECKER, T., HELLING, J., WILLIAMS, M. A., & HOOVER, D. (2022). PUBLIC LIBRARY-BASED SOCIAL WORK FIELD PLACEMENTS: GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES PLANNING TO BECOME A SOCIAL WORK PRACTICUM SITE. PUBLIC LIBRARY QUARTERLY.

This checklist is useful to be sure you and your library are prepared for the student and follow all steps necessary to have the best chance of success with the new collaboration.

ASSESSMENT/PREPARATION

__Need for a student established and library is clear about desired goals of the placement
__Level of student (BSW/MSW) desired and primary level of practice (micro/macro or generalist) determined
__Overview of social work program shared with staff and concerns discussed
__Student roles and responsibilities defined and discussed and job description written

STUDENT PLACEMENT/SUPERVISION

__Field Director/Coordinator at college/university contacted
__Legal affiliation agreement completed
__Student interviews completed
__Social work supervisor identified
__Library on-site task supervisor identified
__Library/social work supervisors in contact and coordinating supervision
__Student start/end dates and schedule established
__Relevant university paperwork signed and any required training completed (for library supervisor)

LOGISTICS

__Workspace/meeting space determined
__Phone, computer, email located for student
__Record keeping plan developed
__Safety plan developed in case of emergency
__Orientation plan discussed with student
__Student orientation completed

EVALUATION

__Learning contract reviewed and signed
__Any relevant evaluation tools identified
__Plan made for assessment of student's performance

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