

Department of Social Work
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Fall 2009

SWK 418/534: Social Work Practice in the School Environment

Faculty: Lisa Burriss

Time: 5:00-7:45PM

Location: Education Building room 266

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Course Description: This elective in social work will explore the practice of social work as it has developed within the public school system. A historical review, examining cultural perspectives that shape the policies of public education, and the delivery of school social work services in the State of North Carolina, will be addressed. In addition, a multidisciplinary approach of services to students and families will be examined as it pertains to the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. Also, special issues will be explored for service delivery, to enhance student performance, across the educational spectrum, e.g. elementary, middle, and secondary education. Special emphasis will be given to exploring the school environment for the application of an ecological and strengths perspective along with solutions focused social work interventions (studied in BSW social work practice courses). An emphasis on service learning will assist the student in comprehending the impact of current and historical policies on direct service delivery with students and their families. The opportunity to practice the application of specific skills and techniques will further provide the students with a clear perspective of the social work role in a school setting.

Course Objective: Upon completion of this course, the student is expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and values for school social work practice that are consistent with beginning generalist social work that emphasizes a strengths based, solution-focused approach. The student is expected to:

Knowledge

- ❑ Summarize the historical perspectives and patterns that shaped school social work practice, especially as they evolved in the State of North Carolina.
- ❑ Identify school and professional missions, policies, programs, and mandates that impact the provision of social work services within a specific school setting.
- ❑ Recognize the interdependent roles of school personnel that shape the delivery of services to children, youth, and parents served by the school system.
- ❑ Articulate significant issues of cultural sensitivity to consider when working with children and families representing diverse cultural orientations.
- ❑ Summarize important aspects of practice evaluation as it impacts the provision of services.

Skills

- ❑ Identify important aspects of collaborative practice, which will enhance cooperation with other school personnel and the larger community.
- ❑ Demonstrate empathic practice skills that are consistent with social work values and the policies of the educational system.
- ❑ Recognize techniques of intervention used by school personnel when working with children and youth identified with “at risk” behaviors within the school system.
- ❑ Articulate skills that foster the strengths perspective in school social work practice when engaging students and families.
- ❑ Demonstrate a beginning ability to assess the school cultural environment for identification of social work planning and program delivery.

Values

- ❑ Discuss the relevance of the NASW Code of Ethics for effective social work practice in the school setting.
- ❑ Articulate the importance of advocacy and collaboration for successful implementation of school social work services.
- ❑ Begin to recognize personal values, attitudes and beliefs that may impede successful school social work practice.
- ❑ Recognize the importance of the change process within the educational system.

No Required Texts:

Each student will need a 2 inch three ring binder and tabs for articles, policies, and procedural guides that will be studied throughout the semester.

Required Assignments:

In order to complete the papers and other written assignments required for this course, each student will need to work with a school social worker in Wilmington or another community. (Names and phone numbers of school social workers are available to assist you in completing this requirement.) Assignments include shadowing the social worker to identify social work roles and functions, interviewing the social worker to clarify interdisciplinary services and expectations, accompanying the social worker on a home visit and participating in a minimum of 30 hours of service learning to enhance awareness of the school practice environment. (If you are currently enrolled in another social work course that requires service-learning hours, or are currently enrolled in field placement, you may be able to use the same service learning hours for both courses, recognizing that there will be different assignments required for the completion of the different courses. Please discuss this matter with the instructor to clear your service learning plans for this course.)

I. Paper:

Each student will write a paper that assesses the practice client of the school setting where he/she is engaged in service learning. First assess the general climate of the school setting. Be sure to take time to observe school culture by observing student and staff behavior as they arrive in the am, experience lunch in the cafeteria, perceive the

principal, interact with the social worker, etc. Select a time to observe behavior in and outside the classroom so that you can observe similar settings and interactions over time. Include a brief description of the schools culture, as you perceive it, and its influence on the functioning of the students and the interdisciplinary team, including the unique contributions of the school social worker position.

In preparation for the paper, the student must actively engage in a group interview of school personnel including a principal, school counselor, school social worker, and a teacher. The interview will take place in class. Students will be expected to ask relevant, open-ended questions regarding the roles and responsibilities of these multidisciplinary team members. In the paper the student will identify the characteristics and dynamics of the diverse roles and how they interface in effective service delivery. Additionally, service learning experiences and observations, as well as theories discussed in the classroom will need to be incorporated.

**** MSW Students and current School Social Workers will be required to reference a particular student or group of students receiving school social work services and describe the interventions or supports provided as viewed through the ecological perspective.***

II. Project/Presentation: You have two choices for this assignment.

1. You may choose to conduct an individual learning project that involves a specific student at the school where you are working, or
2. You may choose to work with a group of students, to experience and evaluate a particular group process that was designed to enhance student performance.

In working with the individual or group, you will identify successful interventions; especially those that reflect the strengths based approach that enhances student performance. Keep a journal of your observations and recommendations and reflections. Be sure to address the following questions:

- How did the student or students come to the attention of school personnel?
- Why was the student invited /required to participate in the activity or group?
- How did the student feel about being involved in this activity or project?
- How did you feel about working with the student(s)?
- What concerns, if any, did you have?
- How did you address or overcome these concerns?

Individual: Select a specific student whom the social worker has identified as experiencing difficulties in the school environment. Observe the student in the classrooms where difficulties occur, outside the classroom, etc. Try to identify the times when “exceptions” occur, when the student is engaged productively, interacting with peers and staff appropriately. If possible, try to engage the student and identify with the student, his or her learning style and interest. Focus on strengths of the student and write a summary (disguising personal identity) that articulates your findings. Identify the concerns that the school personnel have identified. Articulate the strengths the student exhibited and ways that these positive behaviors and interactions can be reinforced and

increased. Describe your personal relation with the student and what ways you found for successfully engaging with the student. Identify your recommendations for school personnel to successfully work with the student, focusing on his/her requests and expectations.

OR

Group: Select a counseling group offered at your school that addresses specific student issues, for example, an anger management group, social skill group, etc. Observe the group, determine how students are selected for group participation, and identify consequences (both positive and negative) for participation in the group. What behaviors are addressed in the group? Does the group facilitator focus on strengths and/or problems? Does the facilitators approach enhance “exceptional” behavior? Do school personnel permit the student to change his/her behavior to engage more positively with the school environment?

Whether you select an individual project or a group project, consider whether you want to involve the parents of the student(s). Why or why not? Give supporting evidence to support your decision.

MSW and current School Social Workers will select a theoretical framework to guide their project and demonstrate application of the theory in their project and presentation.

- Each student must seek prior approval for the project they plan to implement.
- An oral report of his/her experience, findings, and recommendations will be required
- A two-page summary of the project and findings must also be submitted at the time of the presentation

III Policy Project: In teams students will research a given policy and prepare to teach the policy to the class. The team will address the history/origin of the policy, the application of the policy, and challenges school social workers face with regards to the implementation of the policy. An activity in the classroom will enable each team to apply what they learned about the policy for which they were assigned.

IV. Home Visit: Each student is required to make a minimum of one home visit with a school social worker. When making this visit, it is important that the student recognize the importance of confidentiality. You are expected to shadow the social worker to observe ways that the worker engages the parents/family members, the purpose of the session with the parents, etc. and complete the attached form for reflection on the workers roles and responsibilities. A session of the class will be used to share findings and compare school cultures as well as worker functions and style.

V. Time Sheet: Each student is expected to maintain a time sheet that reflects service-learning hours to be signed by the supervising school social worker. If the student is engaged in a senior field placement, a copy of the field hours will serve as the appropriate documentation if you are assigned to a school field placement.

VI. Exams: There will be a midterm and a final exam to assess the student's knowledge and understanding of the course material. Experiential learning, course readings, guest speakers, class lectures and activities will provide preparation for these assessments.

VII. Reading Assignments: Each student is responsible for the assigned course readings which must be read in time to prepare for class discussion.

VIII. Class participation and Attendance: Each student is expected to contribute to class discussion and to participate in class activities. Class participation provides an opportunity to practice professional interaction. Through group participation, you will gain confidence in articulating your position and/or diplomatically questioning your peers. In order to effectively participate, attendance is essential and indicative of your commitment to the professional learning process. Guest lecturers will also assist in the learning process. When guest speakers are scheduled, each student is expected to prepare (and submit) at least 2 questions from the readings or areas of interest related to the topic to assist in generating meaningful discussion related to the topic.

In that class is held only once a week, attendance is vital.

Grades: All assignments are evaluated for quality and timeliness and must be completed for course credit.

Paper	20%
Midterm	20%
Project, Presentation & Summary	20%
Policy project	10%
Home Visit reflection	5%
Class participation	5%
Final	20%

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

August 24, 2009

Unit I: Philosophy of Education & the Social Work Perspective

- Overview-syllabus and assignments
- Required readings for the semester (TBA)
- Philosophy-journey to help explore the school environment
- Setting the stage for school social work practice

- * NASW School Social Work Mission and Standards
- * Critical resources for SSW
- * NC SSW Professional Standards and Job description
- * School Certification requirements of North Carolina
- * List of New Hanover County School Social Workers

August 31, 2009

Unit II: The Roles and Responsibilities of the School Social Worker

- NC SSW Professional Standards and Job description
- Values and ethics of practice
- Program evaluations and performance appraisals
- Strengths/prevention vs. problem/crisis

September 7, 2009 Labor day – No Class

September 14, 2009

Unit III: The Ecological Perspective: A Framework for Impact

- Stakeholders, multi-disciplinary teams, interagency collaboration
(I.e. Student Support Teams/Family Intervention Teams)
- Current functions, values, and ethics of school social work practice
- Negotiating the social work role

September 21, 2009

Unit IV: Significant Legislation Impacting School Policy and Practice

- Laws, policy, protocol
- McKinney-Ventos Law
- Family Educational Rights to Privacy and Confidentiality

September 28, 2009

Unit V: School Social Work Practice Applications

- Student enrollment/school assignment
- Legal Parent and issues where one is domiciled
- Educational Affidavits
- Plyler vs. Doe

October 5, 2009 No Class

October 12, 2009

Unit VI: Historical Origins of Public Education and School Social Work Functions
(Policy teams established and chance to organize as a team)

- **Group interview of Educators**
Topics o include:
Home visits/ Social Histories
Community resources
Individual Counseling
Group Counseling
Building alliances with families
Assessing needs and program planning
- History and development of school social work
- School Attendance-Policy

October 19, 2009 Papers Due

Unit VII: Exceptional Children Services and Related Services
(Projects for individual presentation approved)

- IEP and 504 Accommodation Plans
- Determination and Placement
- Classroom observations
- Social and developmental Histories
- Problem Solving model
- Support for students, parents and families

October 26, 2009 Home Visit Report Due/Policy Project

Unit VIII: Crisis Intervention with Special Populations

- Suicide, Homicide, Gangs, and Risky Behaviors
- Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting
- Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying
- Substance Abuse
- Student Discipline and Behavior
- Traumatic Event Debriefing/ Psychological First Aid
- Grief and loss

November 2, 2009 Midterm

Unit IX: School-wide Climate and Classroom Management

- Understanding behaviors and misbehavior
- Positive Behavior Supports
- Social and Interpersonal skill development/ Conflict Resolution
- Solution Focus/ Cooperative and positive discipline
- Safe Schools and Healthy Students

November 9, 2009

Unit X: Multiple Needs of Students: Diversity in the School Environment

- Multiple Intelligences and Learning styles
- Disproportionate Minority Contacts

- Needs and Rights of Immigrants
- Mental Health in Schools

November 16, 2009 Presentations begins (papers due with presentation)

November 23, 2009 Presentations

November 30, 2009 Last Class

Wrap up discussions and activities relevant to previous topics that call for further instruction or embark on new topics generated by class discussion and exploration.

December 7, 2009 Final exam