



*Letter from the Editor*  
Field Education During a Global Pandemic:  
A Perfect Storm  
Kudos to Our Valued Field Colleagues

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In the grips of a global health crisis, and amidst all the chaos and uncertainty, field educators near and far have come together in the most remarkable of ways. In a world that feels (and is) so divided, the sense of community between us has been balm for these anxiety-filled times. It is in that spirit that we offer kudos to field educators everywhere: for the commitment to students even while distracted by the disruption and loss in our own lives; for the endless days of decision making; for the sleepless nights burdened with worries of life and death for our students; and for the exhaustion of our spirits as students looked to us to make it all whole. Who knew that PPE and CDC would be added to our library of field acronyms, or that we would suddenly feel so closely connected to our institutions' uncertain financial futures?

While it is an accomplishment in its own right that students, for the most part, have been kept on course, it is remarkable to consider the creativity that has been born of this crisis, and even more remarkable to know how freely the work has been shared. In other professions, such creative work might yield the fierce protection that accompanies "intellectual property." Instead, and in keeping with our professional values, we have witnessed a generosity of spirit of a grand proportion. Elaborate projects, assignments, and mini-courses have been authored and offered to one another without mention of proprietary matters. Listservs have been abuzz with questions that have met with speedy offers of help. And all resources have been gathered together by various entities for access as needed.

The gratitude felt for the wonderful field team with whom we have the honor of working each day has grown through these challenging times. And we have been struck by the ways in which that circle has widened. Members of our regional consortium of field directors now share a bond of a new proportion. What was once an

appreciation and understanding of one another's worlds has evolved into a sense of instant friendship, though we may know little of one another.

While we have found the spirit to carry on, may this time signal the need for further reflection for our "signature pedagogy." Times have changed in social work field education. The numbers of accredited programs have grown, and with that growth, a collision course of students competing for field placements – the number of which has not kept pace with those needing them. The work of field departments has looked different with each passing year, and a reckoning of resource allocation should accompany such changes. The placing of our students has become exponentially more cumbersome, but as we are all aware, that is just the beginning of the role that we all occupy. The complexity of field education is a well-kept secret, for all but those who occupy, or have occupied, field staff and faculty roles.

While many believe that we spend our time placing and tracking, the role is far more complex and includes mediating, adjudicating, training, consulting, brokering, remedying, and searching – and in an unrelenting way. The number of constituents and stakeholders is large, and the matters before us are complicated. From the adjudication of findings on a criminal background check to ethical breaches in the field, racial affronts, injuries sustained at the hands of a distressed client, or more "straightforward" performance issues, field staff and faculty have no shortage of stimulation. Already at a "tipping point," a pandemic has put the unique pressures on field education (and field educators) in neon lights. The days of smaller cohorts, fewer placements, and the ability to count on close and sustained relationships with longtime field instructors are fading. Calls have gone out to increase research efforts and innovation in the arena of field education, and rightfully so. Perhaps this moment in time will propel an allocation of resources to make sure that we can step back from the work, and thoughtfully look at our models with the same spirit of collaboration that has carried us through these painstaking months.

For now, however, we send warmest appreciation for the solidarity during this time of crisis. In acknowledgment of the endless hours of work and worry; the pounding headaches and pressures; and the resolve to keep going. We are proud to be among you, our friends – strangers included.