



# Training Field Instructors: Beyond the Stated Needs

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## **Abstract**

The Council on Social Work Education requires field directors to provide orientation and ongoing training to field instructors. In the authors' experience, participants at national field director committee meetings and regional field director consortium gatherings regularly propose collaboration on resources for field instructor training materials. This research arose from that expressed need. A national survey of social work field directors collected the essence of what respondents felt field instructors needed to know in order to enhance student competence effectively. Results reinforced the need for a collaborative repository of educational resources, but also revealed a lack of agreement on what field instructors need to know beyond orientation topics, which are often program specific. Development of national field instructor competencies supported by evidence-informed training materials are necessary next steps. Still, they should be considered transitory to a more fundamental system change that does not rely heavily on overloaded agency-based practitioners for intensive teaching.

*Keywords:* field instructor training; field education; training modalities

## **Introduction**

Social work field instructors are essential authorities in refining and assessing student

competence with real-world client systems. Preparation for the role of field instruction is mandated by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy on Accreditation Standards (2015, AS 2.2.10). Responsibility for training social work practitioners to assume the role of educating and assessing students' readiness for practice lies with the field director.

Field instruction orientation and ongoing training vary among social work programs (Rogers, 1996). McChesney and Euster (2000) stated that "further research is needed to identify more effective training methods [in order] to strengthen the quality of field instruction" (p. 214). Following up on their recommendations, this research examined common practices, resources, and training needs regarding the orientation and training of field instructors. This study intended to contribute to the development of a national online platform for sharing information and modules regarding field instructor training. In particular, the researchers were interested in locating resources that could be shared online, a need that we predicted based upon circumstantial evidence.

### **Literature Review**

Field education is the signature pedagogy of social work education (CSWE, 2015). The CSWE requires social work programs to explain how their field education programs determine their "policies, criteria, and procedures for selecting field settings; placing and monitoring students; supporting student safety; and evaluating student learning and field setting effectiveness congruent with the social work competencies" (CSWE, 2015, p. 13, AS 2.2.7). In addition to this requirement, field instructors who offer students educational oversight must have a social work degree (BSW, MSW) and two years of postgraduate field experience (CSWE, 2015, p. 13, AS 2.2.9). However, according to Educational Policy Standard 2.2.9, there exists an exception for settings with no degreed social worker, such that the onus lies with the university for "reinforcing the social work perspective" (CSWE, 2015, p. 13, AS 2.2.9). With this said, the field director must ensure that field settings offer students "real-world" learning opportunities and educational oversight by trained field instructors to develop competence and understand the social work perspective.

The CSWE requires social work programs to provide orientation and field instruction training for field instructors who educate students within field settings (CSWE 2015, p. 13, AS 2.2.10). Field instructors receive training that covers aspects of field instruction, including policy and procedures, and guidance on supporting student learning (Knight, 2016). Social work programs offer various training formats, such as field instructor seminars and bimonthly workshops concurrent with students' field placement experience (Bogo, 2010). Along with holding a social work degree, these trainings are a vital component of the social work program's requirements for the field instructor role (Parga & Doyle, 2020). In addition, research suggests that

diversified training be offered to field instructors in the areas of child welfare, cultural competency, diversity, group work, substance abuse, evidence-based practice, and critical thinking, which assess supervisory and practice competence (Armour et al., 2004; Dettlaff, 2008; Finch et al., 2019; LaPort & Sweifach, 2011; Rogers & McDonald, 1995; Steenrod & Bael, 2010; Wiechelt & Ting, 2012).

Dedman and Palmer's (2011) research offered an online approach to training field instructors that allows them to schedule sessions on their own time. Massaro and Stebbins (2015) gleaned innovative training topics in a rural catchment area from field instructors' stated interests, collected by surveying instructors. Several high-quality field instructor resources have been developed and published for general use by field directors (e.g., Dettlaff, 2003; Finch et al., 2019). Additionally, training resources exist for field directors, such as the Seminar for Field Instruction (SIFI). Despite this, there is a shortage of evidence-based online training for field instructors (Deal & Clements, 2006).

Over 15 years ago, Wayne et al. (2006) wrote an article entitled "The need for radical change in field education" (Wayne et al., 2006). They cited documentation of increased workloads for social workers that decrease the time for unpaid instructor work and complicate demands to attend training. They noted the proliferation of social work programs, which creates competition for placements and instructors, forcing field directors to yield to pressures by lessening expectations of what qualifies as a field site. They posited that the tridirectional influences of field, classroom, and curriculum are truncated when part-time liaisons and staff are hired to be the main conduits of information between the classroom and the field setting.

Researchers in Canada are studying ways to decolonize field education practices through the use of "cultural safety and intersectional frameworks" (Clark, et al., 2010, p. 6). They are introducing ways to decolonize field education by creating a body of literature highlighting the frameworks of cultural safety and intersectionality. They challenge the academy, and specifically field programs, to center narratives of students, field instructors, and other informants, in order to "shift the power from academic 'experts'" (Clark, et al., 2010, p. 22). The authors brought together field educators who had created new models of field education. These include models that use faculty as the agency-based instructor, move field from under the university auspices to a two-year paid internship model, or replace hour mandates with competency demonstration as informed by other disciplines. These innovations notably remove the dilemma of squeezing more time and effort from social workers' host settings, leaving space for mentoring, but removing the heavy teaching expectation from field instructors and alleviating the burden on field directors for field instructor training.

Field instructors are experienced social work practitioners to whom the academy

“necessarily abdicate[s] significant teaching responsibilities” (Hunter & Poe, 2016, p. 67). Although the necessity for social work programs to train field instructors is clear, CSWE does not provide specific guidelines or a framework for these trainings. Consequently, social work programs across the country vary in what they provide and how often they orient and provide training for their instructors. In other countries, such as Britain, the national social work governing body is responsible for and provides training and certification to field instructors, as well as financial support to agencies (Rogers, 1996). In the US, neither guidance nor incentive exists at this level.

## Methods

The research team surveyed field directors from BSW and MSW social work programs nationally. They used a mixed-methods design to collect qualitative and quantitative data regarding current methods, materials, and needs for delivering training to social work field instructors. The study was approved by a University Institutional Review Board (#495765577) at a large public university in central Pennsylvania.

## Participants

The respondents in this study were field directors from social work programs. An electronic invitation asked them to take part in the Field Instructor Training Need Assessment online survey. CSWE has documented a total of 750 social work programs (BSW and MSW) nationally (CSWE, 2021). To ensure that all social work programs received the survey, the researchers utilized the CSWE field director’s listserv. In addition, a list of regional field consortium leaders published by the North American Network of Field Educators and Directors (NANFED) was used to email each consortium chapter asking them to disseminate the survey to current field directors in their region (NANFED, n.d.). The researchers could not determine the number of field directors who received the email invitation. No undelivered invitations were reported.

Using these lists, the researchers sent reminder emails for three weeks, yielding 160 responses, which is 21.33% of current social work programs. The invitation explained the study and provided a link to the survey in the Qualtrics Management platform. The link contained informed consent language, agreement to which was required to participate in the survey.

## Design

The researchers took a mixed-methods approach to collecting information on current field instructor training practices and training content needs. Purposeful sampling was used to select field directors to assess training needs related to field instructor training content and modalities (Creswell, 2013). By choosing this type of sampling, the

research team could identify trends and gaps in field instructor training within field education.

The data collected was stored through the Qualtrics Management platform in a password-protected electronic format. The survey questions were anonymized. Specifically, the Qualtrics software did not collect identifying information, such as name, email address, or IP address, from the participants. The data gathered will be kept within a password-protected computer for up to five years. It is important to note that one question asked the participants if they would share training content and materials. If the participants agreed to share training content with the research team, it would reveal their identities. There were five respondents who revealed their identities and contact information. The contact information was not included in the results.

The survey contained a total of 19 questions (open-ended and closed) related to field instruction training content, modalities, and delivery. (See Appendix for the survey questions.) Topics included orientation and training, incentives, training content, modalities, and specific field instructor training needs. The survey took approximately five to ten minutes to complete.

### *Quantitative Data*

Descriptive statistics describing the quantitative responses collected from respondents appear in Table 1. A total of 160 responses was collected. The table summarizes the field instruction content, delivery methods, and support materials that field directors use to orient and train field instructors.

### *Qualitative Data*

A thematic analysis (TA) approach was used to analyze the open-ended qualitative data collected about training field instructors. TA is a technique for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data (Braun & Clark, 2016, p. 297). Each participant’s response was manually coded and analyzed by each of the researchers independently. Saldana (2016) defined exploratory

**Table 1***Field Director Social Work Programs Participants' Responses Related to Training Modalities and Content Delivery (N = 160)*

Category	Methods	N	Percent
Ongoing training	Yes	131	82
	No	28	18
Training delivery	Online	64	40
	Face-to-face	137	86
Online training delivery	Asynchronous	56	35
	Synchronous	25	16
Training design	Videos	124	78
	PowerPoint	119	74
	Experiential exercises	138	86
Instructional methods used	Classroom-style training	141	88
	Coaching and mentoring	63	39
	E-learning training	41	26
	Use of PowerPoint via email	45	28
	Video training	38	24
Helpful training materials	Textbooks	21	13
	Refreshers (5–10 minutes)	114	71
	Video to use in face-to-face training	105	66
	Podcasts	69	43
	Articles to read with quiz	63	39
	Online videos/presentations with quiz	112	70
Methods for sharing training updates	Email	156	98
	Canvas, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, or other learning platforms	10	6
	Newsletter	26	16
	Blog	0	0
	Google Drive	10	6

coding as “the use of open-ended investigation and preliminary assignments of codes to the data before a more refined coding system is developed and applied” (p. 294). Specifically, each researcher compiled similar themes and sorted them into categories and meaning (Creswell, 2013; Saldana 2016).

Additionally, during the data analysis the researchers noted that the respondents commonly used the term “supervisors” for field instructors in the survey. Still, the survey used the terms “field instruction” and “field instructor” as is consistent with CSWE language. Despite these variabilities in language, the respondents’ wording was maintained in the reporting of the data.

After the initial coding, the researchers remotely collaborated using Google Docs and telephone and video conferencing to synthesize themes to ensure that the “individual coding efforts harmonize” (Saldana, 2016, p. 36). Kraut et al. (2002) stated that remote

communication styles are used when team members cannot meet in person. The researchers of this article also assigned to “one member the primary responsibility as ‘codebook editor’ [to] create, update, revise and maintain the master list for the group” (Saldana, 2016, p. 36). The researchers met in person for the third and final review of the data. This process allowed the researchers to develop themes that emerged from the data.

## Results

Researchers grouped the themes that emerged from the data review process into three major categories: overall strengths and weaknesses of the field instructor training, field instructor training needs as determined by field directors, and field director needs in regards to field instruction training. Each of these major themes was analyzed and described independently. Two of these also have subthemes that emerged from the responses during this analysis.

### Overall Strengths and Weaknesses of Field Instruction Training

Relationship building and networking between the university field staff and field instructors was identified as a key strength of face-to-face training events. In the words of one respondent, such gatherings provide for “ongoing support and mentorships.” Respondents also expressed that in-person trainings allowed for field instructors to share their experiences with one another, which was identified as a strength. However, a question arose about the outcome of face-to-face training, noting “[g]athering people is positive, not sure what the impact is on field.” This finding relates to Clark et al.’s (2010) findings that relational supports are a strength in field education.

Some respondents were satisfied with the quality of their curriculum for orientation and training and had well-designed materials, while others said training materials were “weak.” Ongoing training poses more challenges, and some comments bring into question if ongoing training is indeed happening in some programs. “Field instructors would like us to offer sessions more often (each of our six sessions is offered once a year), and they sometimes ask for an online alternative.” This response indicates the need for ongoing training, and training offered through online delivery. Some respondents with online training mentioned accessibility, stating that when offered in this format it “can be viewed at the leisure of the field instructor.”

A prevalent weakness mentioned was that getting field instructors to attend (or “attend to”) face-to-face or online training was a challenge. While many field directors wished training had an online component, delivering field instructor training online was also noted as having “been less satisfying.” Parga and Doyle (2020) offer that a possible reason for this is the field instructors’ (FI) “disinterest in content covered, FI’s

assumption that they can perform the role without training, limited time availability, and/or lack of agency administrative support” (p. 1). Additionally, the authors note that adding programming (outside of field instructor training) that allows participants to share their professional development needs and experiences may increase attendance (Parga & Doyle, 2020).

Overall, field directors expressed ambivalence regarding online training. Some programs place students in widely dispersed geographical areas, which was listed as a barrier to getting people to show up for in-person training, yet some respondents indicated that online training was not the best. One respondent shared that “having people physically engage and share experiences is helpful to them.” Researchers observed that programs accustomed to face-to-face training voiced respect for the value of that modality as a way to build professional relationships between instructors and with university personnel. However, they also recognized the need for alternatives to in-person gatherings. Some seemed to find online interactions as necessary, and the request for online training resources appeared consistently. Explicit praise for the online training materials and formats did not emerge as a theme.

Repetition was a theme of concern to respondents. Field orientation, by necessity, is repeated regularly to onboard new field instructors. It is the space where field instructors are introduced to the logistics necessary to interact with the university and students, and learn the basic nuts and bolts of the role’s expectations. Some programs bring students and field instructors together for an initial large meeting. The repetition leaves experienced field instructors with little motivation to attend. The challenge of attendance is consistent with the outcome of the survey done in preparation for the CSWE field summit report (CSWE, 2014).

### **Field Instructor Training Needs as Determined by Field Directors**

Respondents named an array of orientation and training topics needed to assist field instructors develop as educators. The researchers identified three main themes among the responses: school-specific policies and curriculum, field instruction/educational supervision, and knowledge of social work ethics and practice.

#### ***School-Specific Policies and Curriculum***

Respondents wrote that field instructors must be familiar with the unique social work program/school policies and procedures related to field education, program curriculum, learning contracts, student performance evaluation, gatekeeping, and time expectations with students. Field instructor compensation also falls into program-specific information, such as access to tuition reimbursement, Continuing Education Units (CEU) opportunities, and credits for licensure maintenance. These could be

considered orientation themes.

The most common orientation themes reported were roles and expectations, supervision, competencies, and evaluation. These four were consistent across qualitative responses. Although some of this is consistent across accredited programs, the specifics can be very much school specific. Other orientation-related responses that were not as school specific included knowledge of the curriculum, ethics, and professional behavior. Field directors indicated a need for field instructors to be oriented and trained in these areas to best serve in their roles.

CSWE (2015) requires field directors with social work programs to provide orientation and ongoing training to field instructors. The field orientation usually covers the field instruction elements of program policy and procedures and techniques that enhance student knowledge and skill acquisition within practice settings (Knight, 2016). The ongoing training covers topics that are useful for field instructors to enhance their professional development.

### *Generic Field Instruction/Supervisory Skills*

Respondents identified the need for training in generic field instruction and supervisory skills, including the process of field instruction, stages learning, learning styles, giving constructive feedback, gatekeeping, supervisory functions and structure, supervisory relationships, agency orientation, boundaries, treatment of student vs. employee, observation, privilege, and power theory and practice. These responses indicate a need for skill development that is universal in nature in order to serve in the role of field instructor. The most common response in this theme was supervision and the need for field instructors to develop as supervisors. Field directors defined this as understanding the supervisor role and expectations, providing effective feedback to students, and applying theory to practice. Understanding adult learning styles was an example given as something that would help field instructors as supervisors.

Another common response was that field instructors needed to know how to properly conduct and complete performance evaluations. Specific responses about evaluation varied, and some included the use of the learning plan to conduct evaluations, while another mentioned conducting student-centered evaluations. Related to evaluation, field directors also mentioned the need for training field instructors in their role in gatekeeping. Field directors noted the need for supervisors to be able to manage difficult situations and navigate and address challenges with students. For example, a specific challenge mentioned was handling student mental health.

Researchers noted a broad range of generic field instruction/supervisory skills topics, with little recognizable repetition. We acknowledge that training topics could be

organized in many ways, such as orientation, basics, and advanced. However, the lack of repetition creates the impression that the knowledge and skills for field supervision, like those for social work practice, are endless. Still, our profession does not corral the basic core competencies for field instructors as it does for social work students.

Murdock et al. (2006) conducted an exploratory study that asked field directors to rank field instructor competencies in five domains that addressed teaching, evaluation, relationship-building, structural, and role. The results revealed significant findings and implications for training, including field instructor learning needs relating to their role and the ability to evaluate students. In the role domain, field instructors are not “exhibiting clear theoretical orientation” (Murdock et al., 2006, p. 171), which refers directly to integrating theory and practice in the teaching domain. It also found that instructors were deficient (or substandard) at differentiating between the educator and practitioner roles. Another area to consider is the evaluation domain. The findings revealed that instructors struggle with “documenting student’s time, progress and issues” (p. 174). This may be a consideration when training instructors on assessment of students. These areas could strengthen current field instruction training.

The researchers noted that the topic of “observation” was mentioned only once in the survey. Field instructors’ ability to observe students in practice is a crucial part of supervision/instruction. Kourgiantakis et al. (2019) stated the importance of field instructors and others observing and debriefing with students to enhance student learning within field settings. The authors specifically state that “constructive feedback that is specific, timely, and based on observations enhances theory and practice, self-awareness, and builds holistic competence in social work students” (Kourgiantakis et al., 2019, p. 124). Dill and Hanssen (2019) note that observations of students at different stages of field learning allow students to experience the real world, which helps them integrate their knowledge, values, and skills within their practice setting. While many topics were mentioned only once, it is of concern that field instructor skills that have been studied and published do not rise to the level of consistent training areas in the eyes of the respondent field directors.

### *Knowledge of Core Social Work Concepts*

Respondents believed that field instructors needed knowledge of core social work concepts such as social work ethics, competencies, theories and practice models, and safety. These concepts appeared in various ways in the survey. A vast array of additional topics appeared, but with little repetition. Here are examples of the diversity of responses, with the number of similar responses included for context: racism (1), diversity (2), legal issues (1), cultural humility (3), and technology (2). We chose to enumerate the responses for each topic to illustrate that the number of topics was broad. Still, there was no theme suggesting that the field directors and

coordinators had strong opinions based on literature for coming up with the list of core knowledge topics. Also of concern is the minimal attention given to themes of diversity and inclusion. Below are direct quotes from respondents:

- “Effective mentorship, confidentiality, dual relationships, self-care”
- “Conflict, boundaries, self-care, ethics, delegating, trauma-informed”
- “Ethics/boundaries, effective supervision, cultural competence”

We field directors need to examine training content as it relates to required field instruction/supervisory knowledge and skills. Field directors must be vigilant about the information field instructors should know, as common practice does not equal best practice. Again, while categories of information needed for effective field instruction arose across the survey questions, the list of topics was broad and shallow in the data, with most issues mentioned only once or twice.

### **Field Director Needs in Regard to Field Instruction Training**

In order to develop field instructor orientation and training, field directors were asked to identify what specific information is needed. Respondents indicated the need for particular information and resources, which the researchers categorized into three themes: instructional methods and materials, process information, and other resources.

#### *Instructional Methods and Materials*

Field directors indicated the need for instructional methods and materials in order to develop field instructor orientation and training. Having access to ready-to-use materials, with predeveloped instructional techniques and a training curriculum, would allow for an accessible and consistent training process for field instructors. A recurring subtheme in this category was the need for these methods and materials to be available online. Online resources and training options would allow for accessibility and flexibility, with information being available anytime, anywhere, to anyone.

Respondents indicated a need for these online materials to be of high quality and reflect best practices. Having diverse materials such as videos, podcasts, handouts, PowerPoint presentations, and other types of asynchronous material and modules was also stated as needed. The need to have content that would trigger discussion, or short content with follow-up quizzes, was mentioned. Responses included a need for refresher content that is shorter in length for returning or veteran field instructors, as well as CEU opportunities.

Researchers’ reflective observations on responses revealed that some of these resources do exist, but in textbook format. Training-oriented books are updated regularly, and

although some are out of print and hard to find, they are still relevant (i.e., Amour et al., 2007; Dettlaff, 2003; Finch et al., 2018; and SIFI). Finding these books is a challenge that online resources obviate. Online materials provide immediately useful knowledge that field directors can pull from or offer to field instructors.

The benefits of online training materials include the field instructor's ability to work on their own schedule, instead of attending a face-to-face session held by or at a university. Also, for programs that have field instructors spread across the state (or country), ready-to-use, online materials or a training curriculum provide consistent training for everyone. More than 70% of field instructors indicated a recognized advantage in working at their own pace on their own time by participating in online training (Dedman & Palmer, 2011). This was almost a decade ago, when online offerings were not as common as they are today. We also recognize there has likely been a leap in online training with the COVID-19 pandemic and the concurrent move to online teaching.

Having access to ready-to-use, predeveloped training materials would allow for some consistency with training within programs, as well as consistency across programs. Field directors and coordinators are requesting information that they can understand, access, and easily use in order to provide orientation and training to field instructors. Having this information in formats that allow for face-to-face implementation as well as online offerings is needed.

### *Process Information*

The need for information on the process of training was another recurring theme among respondents. This theme encompasses field director needs regarding finding, organizing, and delivering "best practice" information to field instructors. In order to provide field instructor training, field directors must access or create content and determine the best way to deliver it to instructors. This is often done without on-the-job training or guidance, and instead is often figured out over time to the best of the field director's ability. Respondents indicated the need for "best practices" for field instruction and for getting the information to field instructors, as well as specific guidelines on how to put together and execute a training process. Specific responses include "how to link field experiences to various competencies," a "checklist for FI and sample of program's documentation," and "how best practice information is disseminated to field instructors."

The CSWE Council on Field Education (COFE) conducted a national field survey in 2015. The survey was completed by field directors and coordinators, and gathered data on their perceptions of a few essential components of field education. The survey was sent to 540 BSW and MSW programs and had a response rate of 57.8% (CSWE &

COFE, 2015).

There was an overall feeling that training for field directors in the area of field instructor training is lacking. Those in director roles rarely receive training to serve in these administrative capacities. Professional development rarely exists for the field director, due to a lack of time and resource allocation. According to survey results, 59.3% of field administrators agree to some degree that it is difficult to complete the large number of field tasks and responsibilities (CSWE & COFE, 2015). “Field [directors/liasons] are too occupied with fulfilling their work duties to have the opportunity to improve their professional skills” (CSWE & COFE, 2015, p. 31). Although there are sometimes development opportunities for field staff at national conferences, survey responses indicate that “field education staff at smaller social work programs do not have resources to attend CSWE field conferences/workshops” (CSWE & COFE, 2015, p. 32).

Researchers agreed that respondents are asking for best practices for the process of field instruction and for disseminating the information through orientation and training. This emphasizes the importance of not only content, but also delivery methods and processes. This lack of training the trainers, the field directors, is a need that emerged among respondents and has an impact on how field directors approach and offer orientation and training.

### *Other Resources*

Another theme that arose from respondents was the lack of resources. These included resources from their university/program, peers, and CSWE that would allow for support and guidance in offering training and orientation to field instructors.

**University/Program Resources.** There is a general need for resources. Although some of the more vague responses that indicated simply a need for “resources” could be left to interpretation, based on the national field survey of field directors conducted by CSWE and COFE (2015), there is some insight into what these might encompass. Results of that survey indicated that the resources needed were time allocation, money, and staff. Also noted was the need for resources around training for the field directors in the area of field instructor training, access to online systems, and incentives for field instructors to attend training.

Creating a training curriculum and materials to enhance skill and knowledge is a question of time and resources. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents from the 2015 CSWE/COFE survey indicated that the expectation of and responsibility for training for field instructors reside with the field director/coordinator, as opposed to other field faculty or administrative staff (CSWE & COFE, 2015). The theme of lack of

time did not emerge in our survey.

**CSWE Resources.** A consistent response from field directors was that resources are needed from CSWE. Field directors responded that overall guidance from the accrediting body is needed in order to develop field instructor orientation and training. According to respondents, clearly stated accreditation standards, guidelines, expectations, and regulations are needed. Specific responses indicated a need for more generalized information on field and its purpose, and competency assessment.

CSWE serves as the only accrediting body for social work education in the United States. As such, all accredited social work programs must meet the same standards, with the same requirements. Providing clear and specific guidelines and expectations around field instructor orientation and training to programs would allow for greater understanding and consistency across social work programs.

Consistency across programs was brought up as a need especially when recognizing that programs share field instructors, and that a given field instructor may have students from different social work programs in the same or different semesters. Historically, this was the case in urban areas or geographical locations where social work programs were in close proximity. However, as many schools and programs offer online options to students without geographic boundaries, there may be an increased need for some national consistency. One response mentioned a need for “a common curriculum that all programs could use” and “universal training.” Another response expressed a need for “a preapproved field training for the state/region/US so that all field instructors who have completed one training do not have to repeat it.” These responses clearly point to the need for consistency across programs.

**Peer Resources.** A few respondents indicated resource needs that were not repeatedly mentioned, but the researchers feel the need to note them. These responses centered around peer support and guidance from other directors and coordinators. One such response indicated the need for mentoring from other field directors as one navigates this role. There seems to be an acknowledgment of the importance of mentoring, guidance, and support from someone who has more experience as a director as one is developing field instructor training and orientation. As described in their responses, field directors define this guidance as conversation, education/support groups, instruction, and classroom discussion.

The researchers observed that the literature is fragmented in such a way that when some innovation, such as a training guide or competencies for field instructors, is developed, there is no follow-through on recommendations to study the outcomes and improve the tools. The literature on existing training may exist in some capacities but is not widely used. Using similar examples, a few respondents asked for more resources

on training for direct observation and existing curricula for cultural competency.

It is acknowledged that the terms “orientation” and “training” are not inherently confusing, but the activities are sometimes combined into one event, which has implications for long-term instructors who must, if they choose to attend, sit through redundant information. The researchers noted in the responses the absence of requests for time or training for field directors to create online resources.

### **Limitations**

First, the data in this study was gathered prior to the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak that forced many programs to turn to online platforms for delivering training, and so provides a pre-pandemic data set. It is likely that necessity has enhanced field director competence in developing online training. Second, had researchers built into the protocol a follow-up with respondents in real time, it would have been possible to inquire about what influences the choice of topics or method of delivery, or where field directors/coordinators are getting their information for choosing and sourcing topics. Third, the research did not distinctly sort out people who use online training exclusively, nor did it request information related to social work program size.

### **Conclusions**

This research started, in part, to support the creation of a repository for field instruction training materials. The researchers sought information about what field directors and coordinators would wish to put into such a repository, and what they had to contribute. By compiling instructional modalities and materials from social work programs and placing them in a web-based repository, field directors would have a plethora of instructional resources to use in training their field instructors. The data, however, revealed a need for more than a simple warehouse of training materials.

Results reinforced the need for a collaborative repository, and revealed a lack of agreement on what field instructors need to know beyond orientation topics, which are often program specific. There is a need for a list of field instructor competencies that is evidence informed. These training materials are necessary next steps, but should be considered transitory to a more fundamental system change that does not rely heavily on overloaded agency-based practitioners for intensive teaching.

When field directors ask for “best practices” in methods and delivery, they are really asking for *how* to deliver instruction. That is, this is not just a matter of adding valuable content, but also developing innovative methods to educate adult learners. No amount of program requirements, lunches, and university swag will solve the problem of low

attendance at trainings if instructors do not feel there is value to the information. But the most valuable information is lost if it does not reach the audience.

There exist high-quality delivery methods, such as video-like TED talks or Khan Academy courses, which are vetted, edited, and distributed. While these delivery methods are expensive endeavors, their effectiveness is measured by their ability to engage an audience. Interactive web-based platforms that require engagement in the content often require technical skills beyond the capacity of a field director's time or talent. These products require funding and leadership, perhaps through a collaborative effort between private companies and professional organizations.

Relinquishing some of the tasks of training would free field directors to build community among their instructors through in-person gatherings and the use of social media to engage field instructors (e.g., TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp). Premade training products would fill a gap, but would not address the issue of orientation to school/program-specific policies and processes, nor would they build the camaraderie and networking opportunities of face-to-face gatherings around food, noted as strengths by many brick-and-mortar programs. However, online training can free programs to focus on school-specific material regardless of the mode of delivery. Developing high-quality online training resources is a technical skill that reaches beyond the educational content. Hopefully, access to such educational materials would create space for more radical change efforts.

As noted above, field education is the social work profession's signature pedagogy. In law and medicine, this designation implies that only the best trained and most experienced doctors and lawyers train the new generation of students. This is not the reality in social work, so we must carve out our own path toward excellence in experiential teaching and learning, even as we relegate the bulk of this educational process to busy practitioners. Social work programs teach students research-informed practice and practice-informed research, but this study indicates that field educators are not informing our practice with new evidence. Our current body of research does not contain a widely agreed-upon set of competencies for field instructors. It is an injustice to the profession to leave programs to invent field instructor standards on a case-by-case basis. We do not do this with the student curriculum.

Best practices are not the same as "common practices." It is a struggle that every field director has. Field tracks and meetings at social work conferences, regional consortia, a dedicated journal, and a robust listserv afford us ample means to share and borrow from each other. However, the resources available are not always evidence based.

We found the challenges facing field directors to develop field instruction training to be homogeneous. Field directors need user-friendly, well-designed, research-informed

training resources for all field instructors to draw from, conjoined with program-specific orientation materials. However, competing demands placed on field directors combined with turnover leave little time to develop high-quality, accessible, cost-effective training materials (Buck et al., 2012).

While this research reveals topics, techniques, and technology available to prepare agency-based field instructors to teach our students, the researchers now wonder how we can develop a robust field instruction training that makes real change within field education. Perhaps the confluence of the COVID-19 pause in in-agency contacts, and the momentum to decolonize curriculum ignited and led by the Black Lives Matter movement, have created the perfect time for radical change.

### Recommendations

Drawing from the literature and our data, our conclusions build on calls for “radical change” (Wayne, et al., 2006) to field education and demands to decolonize field education by challenging the academy to center narratives of students, field instructors, and other informants in order to “shift the power from academic ‘experts’” (Clark, et.al., 2010, p. 22). We recommend the following:

- Developing field instructor competencies as they relate to current educational standards, to social/racial/economic/environmental justice demands, and to the development of student competence. Building work previously done by Murdock et al. (2006), universally defined competencies would allow for the development of training standards.
- Instituting a process for the development and housing of high-quality, evidence-based curriculum and instructional materials to address those competencies and make them available equitably to all field instructors. The content should be informed by academic and practitioner contributions and be held to peer-reviewed standards. The quality of production should be professional, engaging, and user friendly. Ideally, there would be continuing education credits and a national certification attached. Specialization areas would be represented. A nonstatic modality will be responsive to rapidly evolving justice demands on social work field education.
- Encouraging radical system change by providing time, incentive, and financial support to programs experimenting with innovative models of field that are responsive to current justice demands and do not rely heavily on agency-based practitioners for intensive teaching. Concomitantly, the profession should prioritize and incentivize PhD and DSW candidates to conduct research in field education. Specifically, this could entail running randomized studies on field instructor competencies, outcomes of field instructor support and training, and outcomes of innovative changes as related to the development of student competence.

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## APPENDIX

### Field Instructor Training Needs Assessment Survey

The survey should take you around 5-10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

#### PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

#### BENEFITS

The intent of this study is to publish the results of this research to the wider social work educator audience for use in any way the academy deems useful. Results from this survey will likely influence the development of a repository for field instructor training. The committee working in the repository web project is separate from this research team and they are currently working to identify a web host.

#### RISKS

There are minimal foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be sent to a link at Qualtrics.XM, where data will be stored in a password-protected electronic format. Qualtrics does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. The survey questions will be anonymized and held confidential. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether you participated in the study. However, there is a question asking the participants if they are willing to share training materials. If the participants agree to be contacted their identity will be revealed.

If you feel . . .

- You have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form; or
- Your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project; or
- You have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact [contact information for director of institutional review board at Millersville University].

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

1. Does your social work program offer Field Instructors ongoing training?
  - Yes (1)
  - No (2)
  
2. What training methods are used to train Field Instructors? (choose all that apply)
  - Classroom-style training (1)
  - Coach and mentoring (2)
  - E-learning training (3)
  - Use of PowerPoint via email (4)
  - Video training (5)
  
3. What training topics are important for every field instructor? (List as many topics as you wish.)

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4. What types of training materials would be helpful to you to train your field instructors? (choose all that apply)
  - Textbooks (1)
  - Refreshers (5-10 minutes) (2)
  - Video to use in face 2 face training (3)
  - Podcast (4)
  - Articles to read with quiz (5)
  - Online videos/presentations with quiz (6)
  - Other (please specify) (7) \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What incentives does your program offer for attending and completing field instructor training?

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6. How are field education updates shared with field instructors? (choose all that apply)
  - Email (1)
  - Canvas, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, or other learning platforms (2)
  - Newsletter (3)
  - Blog (4)

- Google Drive (5)
  - Other (please specify (6) \_\_\_\_\_)
7. What information would be helpful to you when developing a Field Instruction Orientation and Training?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What other supports might you need to better support your Field Instructors?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. When designing field instructor training, what types of instructional materials do you seek? (choose all that apply)
- Videos (1)
  - PowerPoint (2)
  - Experiential Exercises (3)
  - Learning Objectives (4)
  - Other (please specify) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
10. When do you typically hold your field instruction orientation and training for field instructors?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How long are your field instruction orientation and training sessions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Are you satisfied with the field instruction training materials you are currently using?
- Yes (1)
  - No (3)
  - Please explain. (4) \_\_\_\_\_
13. Please comment on strengths and weakness of training you offer to field instructors?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What training delivery method do you utilize? (choose all that apply)
- Face2face (1)
  - Online (2)
15. If you use online training delivery, which of the following would best describe how information is transmitted? (choose all that apply)
- Asynchronous (1)

- Synchronous (2)
16. Are you willing to share successful written lesson plans or agendas?
- Yes (1)
  - No (3)
17. If you have online materials, how willing would you be to share those materials in an open access environment?
- I do not have prepared material to share (1)
  - I would be able to share material for free with credit to author (2)
  - Training materials are developed and available for purchase (3)
  - Training materials are developed but not able to be distributed for use (4)
18. Are you currently working on or know of anybody else developing online training for field instructors?
- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
  - If yes, please explain (3) \_\_\_\_\_
19. If a repository of training materials would be developed, would you like to be contacted to contribute materials?
- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
  - If you reply yes, please provide your contact information (3)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The data collected is related to field instructor training modalities, and will be compiled, analyzed, and shared through publication.