Supporting Students with Disabilities In Social Work Field Placements: What Is Being Done?

Author(s)

Jacqueline M. McGinley, PhD
Binghamton University

Christine Escobar-Sawicki, MSW
University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign

Claudia Sellmaier, PhD
University of Washington—Tacoma

Tarek Zidan, PhD
Indiana University South Bend

Abstract

Social work educators have an obligation to ensure inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities, who account for approximately 20% of the undergraduate and graduate population at most postsecondary settings. However, little is known about how MSW and BSW policies direct educators and supervisors to uphold these obligations in the context of field education. This descriptive content analysis employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze a cross-section of 50 field education manuals from social work programs across the United States. Findings suggest that, while most field education manuals articulate policies specific to students with disabilities (e.g., nondiscrimination and antiharassment legalese, disclosure practices, accommodations processes), the depth and breadth of these policies varies significantly. The implications of these findings and emergent best practices for supporting students with visible and invisible disabilities during their internship experiences are described.

Keywords: social work field education; content analysis; disability; accessibility; inclusion

The profession of social work is driven by a mission of promoting social justice and enhancing the well-being of oppressed populations, including persons with varying learning abilities, physical disabilities, chronic medical conditions, and behavioral health needs. [1] The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) *2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) states that social work programs must implement antiracist and inclusive practices across their curricula, which include a disability justice framework (Berne, 2015; CSWE, 2022). Additionally, the EPAS directs social work programs to take an intentional approach to addressing the vast range of student learning needs, including planning and implementing inclusive practices and pedagogies in the implicit curriculum to reduce barriers, while optimizing accessibility and equity for all students (CSWE, 2022).

Disabled students comprise approximately 19% of the undergraduate and 12% of the graduate population, and the number of students reporting behavioral health needs is steadily increasing (Dill & Murphy, 2022; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2021). Despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act in 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) in 2008, persons with disabilities continue to experience disparities in educational and employment outcomes (ADA, n.d.). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), a person with a disability is less likely than a person without a disability to complete an undergraduate or graduate degree and significantly less likely to be employed. However, a study by Barber (2012) identified a number of factors that increased students' likelihood of successful educational outcomes, including frequent utilization of campus resources and meaningful relationships with professional staff, members of the disability resource office team, and faculty members.

A recent survey of disabled Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW), and PhD candidates studying at CSWE-accredited programs found that only 14.8% of the 203 respondents received accommodations in their field placements, compared to 47.1% who received classroom accommodations (Sellmaier & Kim, 2021). This finding is not entirely surprising, as disabled social work students have consistently reported barriers to seeking accommodations in their internships. In an exploratory study undertaken by Reeser (1992), students with disabilities and field

---

1 Notes on language: We will be using identity-first and person-first language interchangeably throughout the manuscript to reflect the diverse preferences of students, scholars, and practitioners within the disability community (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). In addition, we recognize the important discourse occurring across our profession related to the term "field education"; we have limited our use of this phrase to those instances when we are referring to specific educational standards, policies, and practices. Whenever possible, we use the terms "internship" or "practicum" instead.

directors cited prejudice, discrimination, a lack of flexibility, and limited accessibility as common barriers to high quality internships. Another study later found that BSW students experienced a number of barriers to seeking support and accommodations for their mental health needs, including a lack of time, resources, and knowledge; concerns about stigma; fears about breaches of confidentiality; and concerns about the cultural competency of providers and the quality of their services (Ting, 2011). A more recent qualitative inquiry also found that stigma was a core feature of the educational experience of disabled social work students; further, many of the participants in this study reported a limited understanding of how to seek accommodations, and fewer still had an awareness that accommodations extended to their practicum settings (Kiesel et al., 2018).

Social work scholars have argued that these barriers are often the result of the ableism that persists in postsecondary institutions, while highlighting the obligation of social work programs to provide accessible educational experiences for disabled students, and, even further, cultivating a shift in their universities cultures toward a more holistic framework for inclusion (Sherwood & Kattari, 2023). In one such effort to address these issues of equity and inclusion among disabled social work educators and students, CSWE's Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice formed the Council on Disability and Persons with Disabilities (CDPD; CSWE, n.d.). The CDPD functions to develop social work education resources and assist in all endeavors that support the full participation of people with disabilities in social work education. It also advocates for the inclusion of social, political, and economic matters related to disability and individuals with disabilities in the framework of social work education.

The authors of this article, all members of the CDPD, formed a workgroup in the fall of 2022 dedicated to field education. The goals of this workgroup are threefold:
1. To gain knowledge about disability content in field education manuals and discuss how language can be modified to support students' self-determination and empowerment when disclosing disabilities in the context of their practicums;
2. To identify best practices for engaging students, field instructors, and other stakeholders, to maximize support for students with disabilities throughout the internship experience;
3. To disseminate strategies for effectively supporting students with disabilities and maximizing their potential for success during their practicums, including through the development of site-vetting procedures, student-centered accommodation plans, and the ongoing education of field instructors.

This article presents results from a content analysis of field education manuals. Findings suggest that, while most field education manuals articulate policies specific to students with disabilities (i.e., directing students to disability resource offices; advising field sites on nondiscriminatory practices), the depth and breadth of these policies varies significantly. With an understanding of the concerns surrounding disability

stigma and discrimination, we draw upon sample excerpts from field education manuals to discuss students' self-determination and empowerment in decisions regarding disclosing their disability and requesting accommodations.

Methodology

Our study design was descriptive, employing the techniques of content analysis to systematically examine data derived from publicly available field education manuals (Neuendorf, 2017). A four-person research team, composed of scholars and educators who currently serve on CSWE's CDPD, undertook the study throughout 2022. The team began by locating field education manuals from the public-facing websites of CSWE-accredited BSW and MSW programs. The manuals were then analyzed using an a priori coding scheme to determine the frequency with which disability-related content appeared both within the table of contents and in the text of each manual (Ahuvia, 2001; Smith, 2000). Finally, the team extracted text from each manual, including any content related to disability and accommodations, to support a qualitative analysis that aimed to identify replicable best practices in social work programs' policies and procedures.

Data Collection

The research team searched the internet for BSW and/or MSW field education manuals for 50 social work programs listed among the *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Schools for Social Work" ("*Report*"); specifically, the 25 listed first and the 25 listed last. This was achieved by searching college and university websites using queries such as "field manual AND social work" and by using the same query with the college or university name on internet search engines (e.g., Google). During the winter 2022 term, the team commenced data collection and secured field education manuals for 23 of the top 25 programs. To enhance the representativeness of the study sample, the team repeated the search in spring 2022 and located manuals for 17 of the 25 programs listed last in the *Report*. Members of the team made multiple attempts to locate and secure additional manuals for the lower ranked programs, but ultimately concluded the manuals for these programs were either not publicly available or that policies related to field education were included within a student handbook instead of a stand-alone manual.

At the conclusion of data collection, the data set comprised field education manuals for 40 social work programs. Within the data set, there were manuals retrieved for graduate programs (MSW; n = 25) and undergraduate programs (BSW; n = 2). In addition, approximately 33% (n = 13) of the social work programs had publicly available field education manuals for both undergraduate and graduate programs, either in a combined format (n = 2) or as two separate manuals (n = 11). In the latter

case both were included in the data set. A total of 50 manuals was downloaded and stored to a shared Google Drive for later analysis.

Analysis

The study used a mixed-methods design, examining the manuals using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The selected field manuals were scanned for certain keywords using the word search function. The keywords included *disability, ability, accommodations,* and *accessibility*. The research team counted how often the words appeared in the different field manuals. Special attention was paid to making sure that the keywords counted were used only in disability contexts. For example, the word "ability" was counted when it was referring to students' physical or cognitive abilities, but it was not counted when it was referring to students' general abilities, such as the ability to think critically. For the 11 schools that had both an undergraduate and a graduate field manual represented in the data set, the frequency counts were averaged across both manuals to avoid inflation of the total count. The table of contents in each manual was also examined to determine if it mentioned access to accommodations and/or disability services.

Qualitative Data Analysis

After the quantitative analysis was complete, text related specifically to disability and accommodations was extracted from the field education manuals. These extracted texts were then subjected to an iterative, three-step process: (1) systematic analysis using coding schemes; (2) coding and consensus building; and (3) synthesis of findings (Neuendorf, 2017). After reading and rereading the extracted texts, one member of the research team identified a tentative coding scheme—*liability, disclosure,* or *process*—which they presented to the rest of the team for feedback and refinement. The same member of the team coded and binned the extracted texts using the refined themes: *managing risk* (legal); *identifying responsibility* (disclosure); and *accessing accommodations* (process). During recurring meetings, the team discussed all binned data until they reached consensus. Finally, data was synthesized into brief summaries for each of the three coding schemes. These summaries included an overview of the theme and a narrative description of the data related to that theme. One member then reread the extracted texts and refined the summaries to ensure each coding scheme accurately reflected the breadth of policies articulated within the field education manuals.

Findings

The frequency with which content related to disability appeared within the analyzed manuals ranged significantly from program to program. The ways in which this content was expressed also varied across the study's three themes: (1) legal: managing risk; (2) disclosure: identifying responsibility; and (3) process: accessing accommodations. The following subsections report further on these findings.

Quantitative Findings

On average, the 50 extracted manuals mentioned disability 5.51 times, ranging overall from zero to 20 times. Accommodations were referenced more frequently, with an average of 6.39 mentions and a range of zero to 41 mentions across all included manuals. Ability, as related to student accommodations, was used less frequently, with an overall average of 0.5 across all analyzed manuals, with 40 of the 50 manuals analyzed making no mention of the word. Across the 50 manuals analyzed, 27 manuals for 21 schools included an explicit reference to disability accommodations in the table of contents. In one case, the BSW field manual included the reference (i.e., "ADA Policy") in the table of contents, but the MSW field manual did not.

Qualitative Findings

Legal: Managing Risk

Most manuals had language regarding antidiscrimination and antiharassment policies that listed disability as one among many protected categories. Often, these statements informed placement sites that they were prohibited from discriminating against students or denying them equal opportunities on the basis of their disability, while a few others expanded this to include the sites' responsibilities for creating learning environments that were free from implicit bias and microaggressions. In addition, some manuals included references to specific university policies, state laws, and/or federal legislation (e.g., the ADA; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), articulating how these policies established a precedent for accessibility and accommodations in internship settings. Further, manuals often described the process that students could follow if they experienced discrimination and/or harassment.

Some of the manuals defined a person with a disability, most of them using the ADA definition. That is, someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or a person with a record of such impairment; or a person who is regarded as having such impairment (ADA, n.d.). A few manuals were more explicit and outlined a number of specific conditions, including those that impact health, mental health, attention, learning, ambulation,

breathing, vision, hearing, and/or the ability to perform manual tasks. One manual specifically referenced invisible disabilities, which are conditions that can be chronic and/or recurring but not always immediately apparent to others, such as ADHD or HIV/AIDS. Another manual included temporary disabilities and pregnancy as conditions that might introduce difficulties for students when accessing learning opportunities, and thus warranting accommodations.

Disclosure: Identifying Responsibility

The majority of manuals advised that students themselves must decide whether or not (and how much) to disclose about their disabilities and/or their accommodation needs. The manuals directed students who wished to disclose to contact their campus disability resource office, field education office, and/or field sites. Most directed students to first contact their disability resource office or other campus entity (e.g., dean of students), stating that these entities were charged with reviewing any documentation required to demonstrate the need for accommodation, making determinations and issuing letters regarding eligibility, and facilitating accommodation and accessibility requests, including for internships. Some manuals stated that students should contact their field education office (e.g., a designated member of the staff or the office in general), either as the primary point of contact or in addition to the campus disability resource office. A few advised that, should a student want the field education office and their field site to communicate directly about their disability and/or accommodations, a release of information or other form of written consent would be required.

Disclosures made directly to the field education office were sometimes facilitated through confidential surveys, where students were asked myriad questions regarding the placement process, including any "special needs" they may have. In instances involving students in distress or those at risk of failing their internship, several manuals recommended that someone (e.g., field instructor, field education office staff, faculty, colleague) might consider directing the students to contact their disability resource office or refer them directly to discuss their eligibility for accommodations to support their success during practicums. In these instances, manuals frequently noted that students had to make the ultimate decision to seek support from campus resources (e.g., disability resource office, counseling center, health center) to which they had been referred or directed.

Process: Facilitating Accommodations

Some of the manuals articulated how students might seek accommodations, including how the disability resource office, field education office, and/or internship site would work in collaboration with the student to provide "reasonable accommodations." One

manual noted that some practicum sites may have their own systems for ensuring "equal access" for employees and/or interns; in such cases, the university would defer to those processes and seek only to address any gaps. While the majority of manuals encouraged students to request accommodations as soon as possible, some manuals specifically directed students to make disclosures to the field education office early in the placement process, to their internship sites during the interviewing process, or to both entities at the beginning (e.g., first week to a few weeks) of a new semester. Several manuals noted that accommodations could not be made retroactively, emphasizing the importance of timely requests. Other manuals seemed to emphasize early disclosures to allow for greater intentionality in the placement process; specifically, a few manuals noted that the field education office would make efforts to select a practicum site and/or supervisor who had demonstrated a willingness to and/or effectiveness in supporting students with disabilities if disclosures were made.

In articulating the process for facilitating accommodations, some manuals described common adaptations and modifications to policies, practices, and procedures. Common accommodations and modifications are presented in Table 1. Many manuals noted that some field sites may be unable to facilitate some accommodations. Other manuals constrained what may qualify as a "reasonable accommodation," often citing exclusion criteria along these lines: (a) accommodations that are incompatible with the technical standards for admission to, and completion of, the program; (b) accommodations that alter the fundamental nature of the degree program; (c) accommodations that would result in a risk to the health or safety of the placement site, its clients, and/or other students; and, (d) accommodations that would result in undue hardship to the institution. Some other schools, however, seemingly applied a shared responsibility approach, including offering financial and other support to internship sites to ensure that accommodations and modifications were available to students.

Table 1

Common Accommodations and Modifications in Social Work Practicums

Accommodations & Modifications	Examples
Schedule alterations	Flexible field calendars (e.g., early or delayed starts, extended terms, opportunity to work through school breaks)
	Reduced course loads
	Alternative sequencing
	Excused absences (including late arrivals, early departures, more frequent breaks)
Placement alterations	Single site for all internship hours
	Local placements to minimize travel
Assistive technology, auxiliary services, and adaptations	Adjustable tables, ergonomic chairs, and other customizations to workspaces
	Closed circuit televisions
	Note-taking pens
	Reader services and reading assistance software
	Digital conversion software
	Braille, electronic, and large-print formats for print materials
	Qualified sign language interpreters
COVID-related alterations*	Face mask policy adaptations
	Alternative policies and procedures for immunocompromised students

*Several manuals, most of which were from AY20-21 or AY21-22, included specific directives regarding COVID-19 precautions, such as accommodation policies and practices for immunocompromised people. Some manuals also articulated policies and practices for face mask modifications, including for those for whom masking was unsafe.

Discussion

This analysis of selected social work field education manuals demonstrates that most schools included some information about disability accommodations for students, but a sizable minority did not include any reference to this information in the table of contents, which presumably would be the first stop for students looking for it. This is notable, given that other studies have emphasized the importance of communicating students' right to accommodations early and clearly to meet the requirements of both federal laws and to align with accreditation standards (Cole & Cain, 1996; Kim & Sellmaier, 2020). Advocacy for the extension of universal instructional design principles to field education is essential (Lightfoot & Gibson, 2005). In doing so, social work educators could advance more inclusive policies and practices by building accommodations into the front end of the profession's signature pedagogy (Sherwood & Kattari, 2023).

Schools also varied in the level of detail provided within their manuals, with some including only limited language focused on managing legal responsibilities, while others provided a detailed description of the process and the options for

accommodations available to students. Overall, students, both undergraduates and graduate students, had primary responsibility for seeking accommodations in the context of their social work practicums. This study, like others that have sought to advance the principles of disability justice, suggests that social work educators have a responsibility to articulate inclusive policies and engage in accessible practices, recognizing the wholeness and inherent worth of disabled students both in the classroom and throughout their social work internships (Allen & Trawver, 2012; Berne, 2015; Slayter et al., 2023). Our findings suggest that there is more work to be done.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The research team retrieved and analyzed manuals from a cross-section of all of the CSWE-accredited undergraduate and graduate social work programs at a single point in time. As a result, the data set did not include manuals that were unavailable on programs' webpages during data collection and/ or those that had been updated in the time since. In addition, the study sample was relatively small, though still representative of the breadth of social work programs in the United States with respect to size, orientation (e.g., research/teaching intensive, online/seated), and type (e.g., public/private, college/university).

In addition, the use of secondary data limited the conclusions that could be drawn about the policies and practice of field education offices and educators. Preliminary discussions with field educators suggest that the day-to-day operations of a field education office, including how it supports disabled students, might extend well beyond what its manual reflects. This was further evidenced in a conversation between DeZelar, Kiesel, and Whitney (2019), where the impact of relationships, particularly those with supervisors and faculty, was identified as critical in shaping the experiences of social work students with disabilities. Future research is needed to determine the specific ways in which field education professionals operationalize manuals, as well as outcome-based research exploring the strengths and needs of students.

Implications and Future Directions

Field education manuals articulate policies and procedures to educators, practice sites, and students. Beyond their role in managing risk, field education manuals are an important reference tool that can increase a disabled students' awareness of available options and also help them to plan for their internships. Students' ability to self-determine is also enhanced when manuals are comprehensive and accessible (Lightfoot & Gibson, 2005). In addition to discussing strategies and offering examples for ensuring more inclusive field education manuals, the appendix to this article provides a tool that can be used by field education professionals and social work educators when creating, reviewing, and/or updating their field education manuals.

The most comprehensive manuals examined here have information about the process for disclosing a disability, including how andwhen to access campus disability resource offices, and how and when to engage with field education office staff and site supervisors. They also articulate the process and timeline for seeking accommodations, including common modifications and alterations that can be sought. In addition, field education manuals themselves can be made more accessible by highlighting disability-related content in tables of contents and indexes, ensuring compatibility with screen readers, and being made available in multiple formats (e.g., large print, Braille, plain language).

Relatedly, when drafting manuals field education offices should consider the language used, to ensure alignment with the values of inclusion, equity, and justice. For example, policies and practices that move beyond simply offering "reasonable accommodations" to draw upon best practices, such as those articulated by reputable organizations like the Job Accommodation Network, are likely to significantly enhance the internship experience for disabled students (ADA, n.d.). Through both language within the manuals and practices at their sites, students can be empowered to identify barriers proactively and seek accommodations effectively. This is particularly true when manuals emphasize the collective responsibility for accommodations and the process for working promptly to remediate concerns by eliminating barriers. For example, social work programs, in coordination with their campus disability resources offices, can explore opportunities to secure additional funding for adaptive equipment and other resources, such as interpreters, for use at practicum sites.

Recruiting sites and supervisors that are able and willing to operationalize the policies articulated in the field education manuals is key to ensuring the accessibility of practicums. Institutions should require regular training for field supervisors and field liaisons that includes best practices for supporting and accommodating disabled students. Training should also emphasize the role of sites in carrying out the policies articulated in the manuals by facilitating accommodations, creating accessible spaces, and upholding inclusive practices. Collectively, field education office staff, field instructors, and field liaisons may benefit from enhancing their disability cultural competence and adopting anti-ableism priorities, much as social work educators are called to do (Slayter et al., 2023). Further, by articulating how social work educators can respond creatively and with flexibility when challenges arise, well-designed field education manuals can positively impact students' academic success, and potentially increase the representation of people with disabilities within the workforce, thereby improving the profession and its service to clients and the public (Kiesel et al., 2018).

References

Ahuvia, A. (2001). Traditional, interpretive, and reception-based content analyses: Improving the ability of content analysis to address issues of pragmatic and theoretical concern. *Social Indicators Research, 54*(2), 139–172. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011087813505

Allen, M. D., & Trawver, K. (2012). Student mental health and field education: Responsibilities and challenges of field educators. *Field Educator, 2*(1), 1–5. https://tinyurl.com/3d4rp8bh

Americans with Disabilities Act. (n.d.). *Introduction to the ADA*. United States Department of Justice: Civil Rights Division. https://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm

Barber, P. (2012). *College students with disabilities: What factors influence successful degree completion? A case study*. John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development/ Kessler Foundation. https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A62325

Berne, P. (2015, June 10). *Disability justice – A working draft*. Sins Invalid. https://tinyurl.com/5ebp82dj

Cole, B.S. & Cain, M. W. (1996). Social work students with disabilities: A proactive approach to accommodation. *Journal of Social Work Education, 32*(3), 339–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.1996.10778465

Council on Social Work Education. (n.d.). *Council on disability and persons with disabilities.* https://tinyurl.com/mrxbd2ny

Council on Social Work Education. (2022). *2022 educational policy and accreditation standards.* https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/policies-process/2022epas/

DeZelar, S., Kiesel, L. R., & Whitney, E. (2019). A conversation on the experience of field education for students with disabilities. *Field Educator, 9*(2). https://tinyurl.com/5aw7u339

Dill, K., & Murphy, E. (2022). The impact of mental health challenges on social work field education. *Field Educator, 12*(2). https://tinyurl.com/2tyab75v

Dunn, D. S., & Andrews, E. E. (2015). Person-first and identity-first language: Developing psychologists' cultural competence using disability language. *American Psychologist, 70*(3), 255–264. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038636

Kiesel, L. R., DeZelar, S., & Lightfoot, E. (2018). Challenges, barriers, and opportunities: Social workers with disabilities and experiences in field education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 54*(4), 696–708. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2018.1507365

Kim, J., & Sellmaier, C. (2020). Making disability visible in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 56*(3), 496–507. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2019.1661899

Lightfoot, E., & Gibson, P. (2005). Universal instructional design: A new framework for accommodating students in social work courses. *Journal of Social Work Education, 41*(2), 269–277. https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2005.200303129

Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Reeser, L. C. (1992). Students with disabilities in practicum: What is reasonable accommodation? *Journal of Social Work Education, 28*(1), 98–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.1992.10778761

Sellmaier, C., & Kim, J. (2021). Disability accommodation experiences of social work students in the United States. *Social Work Education, 40*(7), 872–887. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1738375

Sherwood, K. L., & Kattari, S. K. (2023). Reducing ableism in social work education through universal design for learning and policy. *Journal of Social Work Education, 59*(1), 119–132. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1997686

Slayter, E. M., Kattari, S. K., Yakas, L., Singh, R. C. B., Goulden, A., Taylor, S., Wernick, L. J., Simmons, L. D., & Prince, D. (2023). Beyond ramps, curb cuts, and captions: A call for disability justice in social work. *Social Work, 68*(1), 89–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swac045

Smith, C. P. (2000). Content analysis and narrative analysis. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (pp. 313–335). Cambridge University Press.

Ting, L. (2011). Depressive symptoms in a sample of social work students and reasons preventing students from using mental health services: An exploratory study. *Journal of Social Work Education, 47*(2), 253–268. https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900092

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023, February 23). *Persons with a disability: Labor force characteristics summary.* https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm

United States Department of Education (USDOE). (2021). *Students with disabilities.* National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=60

Appendix

Accessibility and Inclusivity Considerations for Field Education Manuals

The following checklist can be used by field education professionals and social work educators when creating, reviewing, and/or updating their field education manuals.

Indexing

- Disability-related content is referenced in the manual's table of contents.
- Disability-related content, including keywords (e.g., disability, accommodations, accessibility), are included in the manual's indexes.

Policies & Procedures

- "Disability" is clearly defined. *In addition, this definition:*
    - Adopts an inclusive and expansive view of those visible/invisible and temporary/lifelong conditions that might introduce barriers to accessing equitable learning opportunities and for which accommodations may be warranted.
- Antidiscrimination and antiharassment policies are cited and disability/ability is listed as one of the protected categories. *In addition, these policies:*
    - Clearly state that placement sites are prohibited from discriminating against students or denying them equal opportunities on the basis of their disability.
    - Articulate the responsibility of sites and field education professionals for creating learning environments that are also free from implicit bias and microaggressions.
    - Delineate any possible consequences for field sites and/or field education professionals who violate these policies.
- Specific university policies, state laws, and/or federal legislation (e.g., Americans with Disability Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) are referenced. *In addition, the manual:*
    - Clearly articulates how these policies established a precedent for accessibility and accommodations in internship settings.
- The right of students to decide whether or not to disclose their disability, including any potential implications of this choice for their ability to seek accommodations, is affirmed.
- Specific process(es) that students can follow if they wish to disclose their disability are outlined. *This includes:*
    - To whom these disclosures can and/or should be confidentially made.
    - When disclosures should be made during the field education process and

>   any implications if these disclosures are delayed.
>   - What information may be requested or required of the student, including any forms (e.g., release of information, written consents, waivers) or other documentation requirements (e.g., medical records, testing reports).
> - Specific process(es) that students can follow if they wish to seek accommodations are outlined. *This includes:*
>   - To whom they should make their accommodation requests.
>   - How they can go about requesting accommodations in their practicum setting and/or during their internship experience.
>   - When accommodation requests should be made and any implications for delayed requests.
> - An overview of common accommodations in field education is provided. *This includes:*
>   - Specific examples of adaptations and modifications.
>   - Any exclusion criteria that may impact the ability of the field site and/or field education office to facilitate specific accommodations.
>   - Financial or other support available from the campus disability resource office and/or field education office to assist field sites in ensuring accommodations and modifications are available to students, including the process(es) for requesting this support.
> - Specific process(es) that empower students to seek redress if they have experienced barriers, discrimination and/or harassment at any point during the field education process are clearly described.
> - A list of campus resources (e.g., disability resource office, counseling center, health center), which includes accessible contact information for each entity, is provided.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Ableist language is avoided and/or eliminated. *Instead*:
   - Language that is aligned with the values of inclusion, equity, and disability justice is consistently used.
- Multiple formats (e.g., large print, Braille, plain language) of the manual are readily available.
- The entire manual has been verified using an "Accessibility Checker" and any errors, warnings, and/or tips have been addressed to ensure the accessibility of the document.
- Updates are made regularly based upon feedback from key stakeholders, including disabled students, campus disability resource office, field education professionals, and field sites. *In addition*:
   - Any changes are promptly and clearly communicated to students, field sites, and other relevant entities to ensure timely adoption.