Social Work Field Instructor Training

Module 2: Conducting a Successful Agency Orientation
Learning Objectives for Module 2

- To understand the importance of the agency orientation
- To become familiar with the elements of a successful agency orientation
- To identify strategies to incorporate these elements into supervision
The Importance of an Agency Orientation

Why is an Orientation Important?
- A student’s first few days in a social work agency can set the tone for many months to come.
- Students are often nervous about the placement—a formal orientation may reduce a number of these fears.
- When students do not receive a formal orientation to the agency, they have to spend a considerable amount of time finding this information on their own.

This leaves them with less time to devote to learning.
The Importance of an Agency Orientation

Research findings:

- Research indicates that students benefit from agency orientation activities.
- Students who participate early in the placement in activities that are designed to orient them to the agency report that these activities enhance their field experience (Knight, 2001).
- Students who find the agency orientation helpful are more likely to believe their field instructor is helpful (Knight, 2001).
- The majority of students who are given reading materials about their agency in the beginning of the placement report that these materials enhance their learning experience (Knight, 2001).
- Students who have positive initial impressions of their field agencies have higher levels of overall satisfaction upon completion of the field placement (Fortune, 2001).
Guidelines for Conducting the Agency Orientation

1. Plan before your student arrives
   - Prepare the physical location of where your student will be placed. If possible, your student should have a desk, phone, office supplies, computer, etc.
   - Communicate to other staff members the role and purpose of your student. Research on student satisfaction with field placements indicates that students want to feel like a part of the agency and want to be treated like a professional (Fortune & Abramson, 1993). It is important that other staff members understand the role of your student, which includes understanding that the student is not in the agency to make copies, run errands, etc.
   - If there is any agency paperwork that your student needs to complete, have this prepared to reduce any potential delays.
Guidelines, continued

2. Conduct a Tour of the Agency
   - This will help students become familiar with the physical location of the placement.
   - Introduce students to important staff members as part of the tour. This should include administrative support, other social workers, and the director of the social service aspect of the agency.
Guidelines, continued

3. Schedule a Series of Brief Presentations

- Ask other important staff members to give a brief presentation to the student regarding their roles in the agency.
- Possible presenters include the personnel director, program directors, and department heads.
Guidelines, continued

4. Develop an Orientation Packet for the Student

- Written materials assist students in learning about the agency and demonstrate that the field instructor had prepared for their arrival.
- The orientation packet should include important agency policies and procedures and any other information you believe will help your student understand the agency.
- If your agency has a new employee handbook, much of this information will be relevant to your student and should be provided.
- The orientation packet can also consist of selected readings addressing the practice of your agency and the client population.

This information is necessary for competent and effective practice. Field instructors should not hesitate to assign readings or other tasks to students to prepare them for work in the agency.
Information to Include in the Agency Orientation

An effective agency orientation should include information addressing each of the following areas.

This information can be included in the orientation packet or given verbally, depending on the preference of the field instructor.
1. Important Policies and Procedures

- Agency dress code
- Parking
- Hours of work and overtime
- Times and dates of staff meetings
- Policies regarding transportation of clients
- Reimbursement procedures
- Emergency contact information
2. Agency Description

- Many agencies have written materials that can be given to the student regarding this information—these resources should be provided and reviewed with your student.
  - The clientele the agency serves
  - Eligibility requirements
  - Types of services provided
  - Services that are not provided
  - The role of the social worker in the agency
  - Organizational structure of the agency
3. Identification

- Discuss with students how they will identify themselves to clients and on written documents.
- Develop a title with your student that accurately reflects the student’s role. In all cases, it should be clear to clients that the student is not an employee of the agency. Clients should understand that the student is practicing under your supervision.
4. Confidentiality

- Provide specific information for your student about confidentiality and potential disclosures of confidential information. By this time in their education, most students understand general guidelines regarding confidentiality, but many will still have questions about this issue. Do not assume that your student understands how to handle these matters.

- It would be helpful to provide specific examples of situations that could involve confidentiality issues and guidelines of what should be done in such cases. Be sure your student understands that it is important to discuss with you any questions or concerns regarding confidentiality as they arise.
5. Safety Issues

- Talk to your student about any safety precautions applicable to your agency or the surrounding area. Many students beginning their field placements have concerns about conducting home visits. This is a good opportunity to address these concerns.

- If your agency has a security officer, arrange for the student to meet with this person.
6. Agency Jargon

- Provide your student with a glossary of agency jargon, particularly as they start to read agency files and reports.
7. Making Referrals

- Provide your student with information on how to locate and make referrals to community resources. Students can be given an orientation assignment of developing a resource packet to assist them throughout the placement.
8. The Supervisory Relationship

Talk to your student about your expectations for the supervisory relationship, including the following:

- Your style of supervision
- Roles and responsibilities for you and the student
- Your vision of the working relationship
- Guidelines regarding your availability
- Whom the student should contact when you are not available
- Guidelines regarding assignments and submission deadlines
- A tentative overview of how you see the placement progressing
Assignment

- Read the chapter attached to this module on the website “Beginning Processes in Field Instruction: Setting the Stage”
- In a Word document, briefly discuss the elements discussed in this module that you currently include in your student orientation, the elements that you do not include and how you plan to revise your orientation to include them, the strengths of your current agency orientation and the areas that you plan to enhance. Be sure to include your name, agency and contact information. Email this document to the CSUF Director of Field Education: cford@fullerton.edu
- If you have any questions, please contact the Field Education office at 714-278-8479.
References


The reading assignment is Chapter 2 from: