MODULE 6: ETHICAL ISSUES IN FIELD EDUCATION
Learning Objectives

- To understand the important ethical issues in field supervision.
- To understand the areas of potential liability in field education.
- To identify strategies for incorporating ethical responsibilities into practice.
What are the ethical issues in field supervision?

- Conflicts of interest
- Confidentiality
- HIPAA Privacy Rules
- Student Research Projects
- Dual Relationships and Boundaries
Conflicts of Interest

- The NASW Code of Ethics provides guidelines for ethical practice
- Field Instructors model how to handle ethical content and conflicts in practice
- Field Instructors must help students become aware of personal values and how they may impact practice

Examples:
- Social work values emphasize the client’s right to self-determination vs. agency values that focus on administering social policies and procedures
- Personal values such as religious views or pro-life/pro-choice vs. agency mandate to non-discriminate
Confidentiality

- Field Instructors assist students to learn the difference between the law and the ethics of confidentiality
- Field Instructors help students to understand the limits and exceptions to confidentiality

Examples:
- Reporting of abuse
- Informing clients of the requirements of 3rd party payers
- Social work values emphasize advocacy for clients vs. funding policies and programs that seem to deny clients a continuum of care
Field Instructors assist students to understand what constitutes “Protected Health Information”

Examples:
- Review of agency records by students
- Information in student process recordings
- Electronic transmission of client information
- Awareness of privacy of computer screens
Student Research Projects

- HIPAA regulations may also affect students conducting research in agencies.
- Students must understand the ethics behind such protocols.

**Examples:**
- Limited data use
- Strict guidelines and protocols in order to protect client information
Dual Relationships and Boundaries

“Social workers who provide supervision or consultation are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries” NASW Code of Ethics 3.01b

Field Instructors “should not engage in any dual or multiple relationships with supervisee in which there is a risk of exploitation or of potential harm to supervisee” NASW Code of Ethics 3.01c

A dual relationship is one in which a professional has an additional relationship with a client. This second relationship may be social, financial, sexual, etc.

Examples:
- Maintaining the boundaries between therapy and supervision
- Field Instructors are key figures in modeling professional boundaries for students
- Field Instructors also model for students how not to abuse power and authority by maintaining appropriate working relationships
- Field Instructors help students anticipate the possible consequences, positive and negative, of proceeding with a dual relationship
Professional Liability in Field Supervision

- The Field Instructor has the potential to be held liable for the actions or inactions of their supervisees when negligence can be proven.
- This is possible under the legal principle of *vicarious liability*.
- It is important that Field Instructors understand this potential personal liability and provide for an appropriate level of supervision throughout the placement in order to reduce the potential.
How Would You Handle These Ethical Dilemmas?

In a separate Word document, answer the following questions. When complete, email to cford@fullerton.edu. Don’t forget to put your name and the date on the Word document.

1. The intern coordinator at your agency assigns you a student for the academic year. The student is the same gender as you, the same age. As you get to know the student over the first semester, you discover you have a great deal in common. Discuss what potential ethical issues might arise and how you would handle these both personally and in supervision.
2. Your student is running a group for women. Several of the women in the group disclose that they were molested as children. In supervision, your student discloses that she, too, was molested as a child. She wonders if it would be helpful to the women if she were to disclose this to them? How would you handle this in supervision? What biases do you have that might cloud your response to the student?
3. You notice through process recordings and supervision, that your student seems to favor some clients over others. In discussion during supervision, your student tells you that he/she has strong religious beliefs and is experiencing difficulties relating to clients who have alternative beliefs/behaviors. How would you help this student to connect with his/her clients? How would you help your student to balance his/her own values with acceptance of client self-determination?