A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

This field manual, on-line for the first time this year, serves as a guide to social work field education at the National Catholic School of Social Service (NCSSS) for students, field instructors, community agencies, field seminar instructors, and faculty. Let me take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to Ms. Loretta Vitale Saks as well as Dr. Lynn Milgram Mayer, and Dr. Marie Raber who respectively chair the baccalaureate and master’s programs, for their significant contributions to the success of the field education program. Field education offers the unique opportunity to merge theory with clinical practice and policy development. You are about to begin a field experience that can enable you to address and resolve many serious social problems and challenges that confront us in our local communities as well across our nation. Our primary objective within NCSSS is to provide opportunities and the resources for you to achieve your career goal so that you leave NCSSS fully prepared to be a leader within the field of social work.

Throughout our history, NCSSS has demonstrated a consistent commitment to address the complex needs of clients, families, and communities, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable and underserved populations. The programs of NCSSS are fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, and the NCSSS is consistently ranked among the top 20 schools of social work in the United States.

The field education program, overseen by Ms. Loretta Vitale Saks and Dr. Ellen Thursby, Associate Director, with the able assistance of Ms. Nenita Sola, Administrative Assistant, offers access to learning experiences in a wide range of social service delivery agencies and organizations. We believe that your field experience is structured to address and meet the demands of the complex psychological and social problems evident in American society. Graduates of NCSSS are prepared to demonstrate and apply their skills and expertise to the diverse problems that afflict many of our communities across the country.

The faculty and staff of NCSSS hope that your experience will be challenging and rewarding. I encourage you to discuss your progress and concerns with Ms. Vitale Saks or Thursby. Let me take this opportunity on behalf of our students and faculty to acknowledge the personal commitment of our field instructors and agency administrators. I want to also express my sincere appreciation to our field liaisons who fulfill a valuable role in their relationships with our field students, agencies and field instructors.

James R. Zabora
James R. Zabora, Sc.D.
Dean
A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF FIELD EDUCATION

Field education is a critical and integral component of the social work program at the National Catholic School of Social Service. A strong field education program requires a partnership between students, field agencies and the school. We in the Office of Field Education work continually to develop, strengthen and maintain a positive, mutually rewarding relationship with all those involved.

According to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), our accrediting body, field education is the signature pedagogy of social work education:

“Signature pedagogy represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioner. Professionals have pedagogical norms with which they connect and integrate theory and practice. In social work, the signature pedagogy is field education.”

This Field Education Manual, directed to our students, field instructors and Integrative Seminar instructors/field liaisons, is meant to serve as a reference guide for the field education program at the National Catholic School of Social Service. This manual includes information about our social work curriculum, as well as a wealth of information related to field education -- responsibilities of participants, policies and procedures, evaluation, etc. For the first time this year, we are publishing our manual on-line only. We welcome feedback, especially if you find it difficult to access the manual on-line – we will do what we can to assist you, including a paper copy if necessary.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. We look forward to working together to prepare our students for professional social work practice.

Loretta Vitale Saks
Loretta Vitale Saks, MSW, LCSW-C
Director of Field Education
Adjunct Assistant Professor

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A LETTER TO STUDENTS FROM A 2000 NCSSS GRADUATE (NOW FIELD INSTRUCTOR!)

Each of you is destined to have a first field experience marked by people, events and emotions which will leave an indelible mark upon you. I would like to pass on some thoughts on how to fully embrace the invaluable opportunity set before you. I will limit myself to 10 points, rooted in experience and spoken with honesty.

1. **Hold fast to the vision and driving spirit that initially brought you to social work.** The strength of social work is due in part to the variety of backgrounds, talents and knowledge bases each student brings. Perhaps you decided to enter the program years after your undergraduate education, maybe it is a second career choice, or even the natural progression following your recent college graduation. Whatever your story, you came here because of a certain calling or stirring within yourself. If you cling to that conviction, you will always possess the essential element, which everything else in this program builds upon.

2. **Listen deeply, closely, and actively.** Whatever the population you will be working with - children, adults, or elderly - your role is to "be with" the client. This necessitates listening like you never have before, not only with your ears of course, but tuning in with your eyes, your heart and your body. Some call this "use of self," I like to consider myself as an "instrument of change." If you cannot walk a mile in your client's shoes, why not try the simple power of empathic, open-hearted, non-judgmental, intensely interested listening? I learned that the time, energy and attention channeled into this was the cornerstone for relationship development with all of my clients. Essentially, if a client feels comfortable opening a window to his or her world, this is a green light for working toward change together.

3. **Live out the questions.** We are students and we should relish this opportunity to learn. Embark on your field placement with the peace of mind that your agency does not expect you to know all the answers. That is why you are there: to be oriented, to problem solve, to be truly challenged. Gradually as you become more comfortable with your co-workers and supervisor, capitalize on their experience and wisdom. Come to your weekly supervision with pertinent questions and together with your supervisor, stretch your mind in applying theory to particular aspects of the practice. Likewise, actively participate in your integrative seminars. In this safe setting, you can continue to probe those questions and voice concerns, all while growing in knowledge with your fellow classmates under the guidance of remarkable instructors.

4. **Use your voice.** It does not matter whether you are innately extroverted or quiet by nature. In dedicating yourself to this profession, you learn to use your voice to advocate. By advocating, I do not mean minimizing the voice of your clients, but rather speaking, writing and acting on their behalf - to support them in their quest for empowerment. To my surprise at times, I learned that my voice does have an impact, even though it is that of a student. Perhaps the most indelible moments are those when I felt so impassioned about my clients' situations that I was moved to take risks in order to effect change for them. If you hold fast to the basic tenets of honesty, integrity and an individual's right to self-determination, that voice of which I speak will naturally sound forth from you.

Don’t ever lose sight of the fact that you possess the key to influencing what becomes of your first field placement. You have a substantial support network behind you. The Office of Field Education, my field liaison and the integrative seminar all served as ways to effectively address my concerns and questions regarding this pivotal part of the master's experience. Finally, don’t be hesitant in voicing your concerns. More often than not, you are also clarifying the path for those who are traveling with you and will follow you in years to come.

5. **Focus on one aspect of your field and become passionate about it.** Even if the field of practice you are assigned to is not the area in which you plan to have a concentration for your professional career, it is definitely worth your while to familiarize yourself with a particular aspect of your field that you find interesting. Then capitalize on the numerous ways you can explore this subject at length through projects and papers in your classes. The key is to find a topic that genuinely sparks something within you. However, this will all come with time. It is important to just stay open and the passion will find its way to you.

6. **Be patient.** I’m learning that social work cannot be measured in output at the end of a work day. Rather it
necessitates trust, relationship building and faith in the small steps made. In retrospect, without patience, one of my most profound work experiences would never have occurred. It involved placing an isolated, reluctant to trust, physically frail, elderly Asian-American woman into an appropriate care facility. Currently she is thriving and enjoying her numerous, significant relationships.

7. **Unleash the potential of your classwork.** Simply stated, there is tremendous opportunity for you to better understand the nature of your agency, your work, your clients and even your growth as a professional - if you take seriously the assignments such as learning plans, process recordings, practice model papers, etc.

8. **Respect differences.** It goes without saying that social workers know the importance of respecting and accepting the diversity of their caseloads. When you commit to “be with” the client, you are acknowledging that whatever makes that person who he/she is, is part of your work together and has a role in the movement toward effecting positive change.

9. **Don’t expect the human condition to be anything but complex.** Not every presenting problem can be neatly solved, nor is every client pleasant to work with. Essentially, be prepared for the discomfort that accompanies working with a wide range of human emotions, circumstances, and value systems. You will come to realize, as I have, that social work entails compassionately and effectively responding to the needs of individuals and larger systems. The work would not be challenging if it did not involve coming face-to-face with resistant clients, restraining from imposing your value system on your clients, having to weigh the ethical implications of certain decisions, and understanding the relationship of boundaries and transference to your work.

10. **Expect the unexpected.** Spontaneity clearly has a place in this work. Even though you think you know where the path is leading you - don’t be deceived; prepare for a wide range of human emotions. I’d like to think that I carry with me at all times, (though this is not a definitive list) the following: a paintbrush, a pack of tissues, and a camera. The paintbrush is for those moments when you just get swept up in the potential for creative tactics - I’m reminded of the occasion when a client related to me that her home health aide always did that dance, “the booty call” for her - Could I? The pack of tissues is for allowing our clients to lay down their problems before us, and also for being honest with ourselves and the emotions that these clients elicit from us. Need I say that those who can laugh fully also know how to weep with their whole heart. And finally the camera is for a selfish reason - yet I am sure you will also want to keep a mental picture of the amazing individuals who will forever change the way you see things.

Best wishes with your field experience, or what I like to consider as “the heart and soul” of the social work curriculum. May you be blessed with the riches of deepening wisdom, profound human encounters and an ardent passion for your place in this profession.

Carlene Costello  
MSW, NCSS, 2000  
(Excerpted from presentation to new students, August 1999)