**ScWk 141, 230 & 232 - Developmental Stages of Internship**

**Stage One: Arranging and Anticipating an Internship**

When a student first secures the Internship, they often experience "Intern excitement," high motivation, and idealistic expectations. There may also be some self-doubt, "Can I really do this? Am I qualified? How do I fit into the social work environment?" By completing and negotiating the Learning Agreement, Interns develop self-confidence and more realistic expectations. Interns become "active" learners. The Faculty Field Liaison’s (FFL) role is to empower students to be active in problem solving and developing the Learning Agreement with the Field Instructor (FI).

**Stage Two: Orientation and Establishing Identity**

When the Intern arrives on site, the Intern is preoccupied with new learning, information and finding an identity in the workplace. Interns may feel overwhelmed by too much information or under-whelmed by simple and routine tasks. Fis and FFLs can help Interns realize that this is a typical adjustment period that all new interns experience. FIs can encourage strategies that will establish student’s competence such as regular supervision meetings, tactics for meeting people, and approaching their workload. The FI and Internship agency may also need to consider developing some training opportunities for the Intern.

**Stage Three: Reconciling Expectations with Reality**

Once Interns establish work routines, Interns often find the situation different from what was initially expected. Differences between work and school become clear: there isn't the same flexibility of scheduling, the work may not be very exciting or challenging, the work may not go as smoothly as their work in the classroom, and there are serious consequences for being late or not completing the work tasks. This presents an opportuntity to re-evaluate expectations, identify new and realistic goals, and reflect on skills and strategies already learned. FFLs may need to encourage the Intern to become more assertive about needs and to negotiate with the supervisor.

**Stage Four: Productivity and Independence**

If Stage Three is successfully negotiated, Interns move to this stage, which is characterized by increased learning and productivity on site. Interns become more confident and self-aware, focus energy on accomplishments, and feel integrated into the work group. Interns can demonstrate their competence and receive specific feedback designed to improve performance.

**Stage Five: Closure**

Creating closure may be difficult for the Intern and the agency does not always facilitate it. Some agencies are good at teaching about and supporting termination and closure. However, some Interns leave with a sense that they "didn't matter," others leave feeling that they can't get the assignments completed. This is where the value of the learning agreement is evident. The final evaluation uses the learning agreement as a guide and should indicate what skills and knoweledge were developed. Interns can seek career advice and recommendation letters from the FIs.

**Stage Six: Re-Entry and Practical Application**

Students need to focus the benefits of the Internship either as it applies to the integration of classroom and field education. They may have difficulty translating the learning into skills and insights useful to job search. At this point, FFLs and FIS can help students prepare for job interviews by assisting them with preparing to answer questions about the skills and knowledge they developed in their internships. Reminders of how much interns learned and achieved and how prepared they are now is helpful as is concrete examples of their work.

**Typical Problems in the Internships**

The following are warning signs that there are some problems with an Internship:

* Conflick between learning styles of intern and field instructor.
* Too much "gopher" work (stapling, copying, filing, etc.).
* Student lack of responsibility.
* Personal or emotional problems hampering the Intern's functioning at work.
* Sexual harassment of the Intern or by the Intern in the work setting.
* Burnout because of over work, perhaps brought on by all the student's responsibilities, in and out of the Internship.