



CONNECTING CORE COMPETENCIES SERIES

# The Social Work Practicum

A GUIDE AND WORKBOOK  
FOR STUDENTS

SEVENTH EDITION

Cynthia L. Garthwait



## CSWE EPAS 2015 Core Competencies and Behaviors in This Text

| Competency  | Chapter                           |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior</b>  |                                   |
| Behaviors:  |                                   |
| Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context | 1, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17     |
| Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations  | 11, 12, 15, 16                    |
| Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication  | 2, 5, 11, 12, 15                  |
| Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes  | 4, 12, 13                         |
| Use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior  | 2, 3, 7, 13                       |
| <b>Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice</b>  |                                   |
| Behaviors:  |                                   |
| Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels   | 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 17            |
| Present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences  | 2, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17      |
| Apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies   | 5, 8, 10, 11, 16                  |
| <b>Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice</b>   |                                   |
| Behaviors:  |                                   |
| Apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels   | 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17 |
| Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice  | 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16   |
| <b>Competency 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice</b>  |                                   |
| Behaviors:  |                                   |
| Use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research  | 2, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16              |
| Apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings  | 4, 9, 10, 14, 15                  |
| Use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery  | 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16                 |
| <b>Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice</b>  |                                   |
| Behaviors:  |                                   |
| Assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services  | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17    |
| Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice  | 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17    |



## CSWE EPAS 2015 Core Competencies and Behaviors in This Text

| Competency   | Chapter           |
|--|-------------------|
| <b>Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</b>   |                   |
| Behaviors:   |                   |
| Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies                          | 4,5,6,7,8,9,13,14 |
| Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies   | 4,5,8,10,14,16    |
| <b>Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</b>  |                   |
| Behaviors:   |                   |
| Collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies  | 5,8,10,14         |
| Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies | 8,9,10,14         |
| Develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies  | 5,7,10,14         |
| Select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies   | 2,10,14           |
| <b>Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</b>  |                   |
| Behaviors:   |                   |
| Critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies   | 10,11,14          |
| Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies                   | 6,7,8,10,14       |
| Use inter-professional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes  | 5,6,8,14          |
| Negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies  | 5,6,7,8,10,14     |
| Facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals   | 10,14,15          |
| <b>Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</b>  |                   |
| Behaviors:   |                   |
| Select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes  | 10,14,15          |
| Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes  | 6,10,11,14,15     |
| Apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels  | 3,7,14,15,17      |

Adapted with permission of Council on Social Work Education.

SEVENTH EDITION

# The Social Work Practicum

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A Guide and Workbook  
for Students

Cynthia L. Garthwait  
*The University of Montana*

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# Foreword

Having served as the BSW and MSW Practicum Director at the University of Montana School of Social Work for the past 13 years, I heartily agree with the Council on Social Work Education that practicum is the signature pedagogy of social work education. For students, the practicum is where the real needs of real people must be addressed. It is in the practicum that students begin to practice what they have learned in the classroom, but now in actual social work settings. This growth from student to professional is not achieved easily, and students are often very nervous about beginning this journey. They understandably have many questions about the process and how they will remember and integrate their classroom knowledge in order to be effective social workers.

Students need much more than supervision in the practicum in order to integrate theory and practice. They also need help in navigating this integration process. Schools of social work have the responsibility for addressing what could be a gap between the classroom and practice, and this book can help them fulfill this responsibility. This book provides a user-friendly but in-depth format and guide for students in both BSW and MSW programs seeking to maximize the practicum experience.

Cynthia Garthwait, the author of this book, is an experienced social worker, educator, practicum director, and administrator. She has a thorough understanding of what social work students need in order to be successful in the field. She has designed the book to correlate with and build upon coursework that students have already taken. She has developed stimulating content, critical thinking questions, links to relevant videos, and workbook activities that will help students translate the theories and knowledge they acquired in the classroom into real skills in actual practice.

*The Social Work Practicum: A Guide and Workbook for Students* is the ultimate tool for students to utilize during their practicum. This book makes it very clear how students can integrate their classroom learning with the practicum setting. It also provides informative learning activities that can be used within practicum seminars and advanced practice courses, allowing for faculty-to-student immersion in the content. Many students have told me that this book was extremely helpful to them in the transition from the classroom to the field.

The book provides students with the educational tools needed to have a successful practicum and social work career. It is based on CSWE EPAS 2015 competencies and practice behaviors, and helps instructors by tying content and activities into the practice behaviors required for both practice and CSWE EPAS 2015. It helps students understand, prepare, and develop their practicum learning agreement to assure that they secure the best social work practicum experience possible. Because of this, they develop a deeper understanding of the planned change process and how it is utilized within their practicum

site. Students also learn how to utilize the supervision provided by their agency field instructor in a constructive manner. *The Social Work Practicum: A guide and Workbook for Students* is a wonderful tool to assure that students get the best experience possible.

The book helps schools of social work meet the requirements of the Council on Social Work Education for teaching and measuring competencies and practice behaviors. It offers hands-on learning experiences which can be tailored to the needs and mission of individuals programs. This book also offers short essay questions and multiple-choice questions that can be used for measuring student learning outcomes.

As a social work educator I unconditionally recommend this book for all social work students in BSW/MSW practicum placements. It is definitely a highly effective tool to enhance the linkage between theory and practice, making for a highly successful experience in practicum and beyond.

Tondy Baumgartner, MSW, LCSW  
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University of Montana  
School of Social Work

# Preface

Social work educators who are intent on engaging students in the integrative experience of blending theory and practice know how challenging and exciting the practicum can be for both students and faculty members. This book is meant to be a resource for that endeavor and a central feature of a learning laboratory where classroom knowledge and real-life practice are integrated and blended into social work practice. Students seeking ways to apply the perspectives, theories, and models learned in an academic setting will find a valuable resource in this book. This text can help students translate academic learning into actual practice skills and behaviors, and can also support them as they learn to provide services to very real clients in very real settings. It can enhance the competencies required for practice, and facilitate the transition from student to professional.

Each chapter provides a focused, succinct summary of a topic that must be understood and applied in the practicum setting. The chapters provide a foundation for each other, each one informing the others and building toward a multifaceted and complete set of competencies necessary for effective practice. The chapters also offer critical thinking questions, links to videos that illustrate ideas presented, workbook activities that build skills, and additional suggested learning activities.

Because professional practice requires an ongoing commitment to acquiring knowledge and enhancing skills, this text offers a methodology for beginning social workers that can be carried into practice and used throughout a career. Using this book as intended, combining it with a university social work program mission, and tailoring it to individual career goals will produce intentional, values-based, and competent practice. Because the process of professional development is not complete when the practicum concludes, but rather begins at another level, it is my hope that you will use this book to guide your own unique professional journey.

## New to This Edition

The Enhanced Pearson eText provides a rich, interactive learning environment designed to improve student mastery of content with the following multimedia features:

- Video links to topical videos accompanied by a question to encourage reflection or critical thinking.
- Essay-format quizzes on major sections in each chapter give students the opportunity to check their understanding of the section as they read. Feedback is provided to students after submitting their response.
- End-of-Chapter multiple choice quizzes allow students to demonstrate their understanding of the major concepts in the chapter. Feedback for the correct answer is provided to help scaffold learning.



This edition includes new content on:

- Guidelines for electronic communication and the use of social media
- Organizational communication that influences clients and practice outcomes
- Social problem analysis models and perspectives
- Principles of work with involuntary clients
- Community practice, including community development and community organization
- Policy practice in response to social problems
- Professional development plans, including licensure

Significantly revised content on the following is included:

- Personal safety for social workers
- Social policy analysis models
- Evaluation of practice, including understanding and learning from ineffective interventions

### **Acknowledgments**

Designing a textbook that will effectively prepare students to enter the social work profession requires a blending of knowledge and professional skills gained over many years of both practice and social work education. The knowledge shared in this edition is drawn from exchanges with clients in a wide variety of social work settings, and is enhanced by their life stories of strength, perseverance, and courage. Their struggles and achievements, at times made easier by the support of a social worker, inform my efforts as an educator. My BSW and MSW students, when using resources such as this text to integrate theory with practice have taught me about commitment, enthusiasm, and fulfilling one's professional calling. Thanks go to Gary, who has always supported my commitment to students and the clients they are learning to help. Thanks also to the reviewers of this text: Erika Galyean, Indiana University Purdue University; Dawn Marie Green, Southwestern Michigan College; Linda S. Helm, The Ohio State University; and Carlene Quinn, Indiana University.

# 1

## Purpose and Expectations for Practicum



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### STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

Although the chapters in the book are numbered in the conventional manner, this is not to suggest that you must move through the book sequentially, one chapter after another. Rather, the book is structured so that chapters build upon each other and at times can also be reviewed in conjunction with each succeeding chapter. It is expected that you will move back and forth between sections and will also revisit the same section several times as you gain experience in the practicum and begin to look at various questions and issues from new perspectives. The chapters may also be read in a different order to accommodate the structure and outline of your school's program.

Each chapter begins with a list of **Learning Outcomes** designed to help you focus on competencies and your efficacy as a social worker in specific practice areas. Each chapter contains a section titled **Chapter Preview**, which presents a short capsule of the chapter content and reasons that the focus of the chapter is essential. It also describes the relationship between this chapter and previous ones, while also linking it to chapters that follow. The first major section of each chapter, **Background and Context**, presents selected concepts and principles related to the topic addressed by the chapter. The concepts and definitions presented in this section are not a

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Explain how student, university, agency, and client expectations for practicum will result in a positive practicum experience.
- Identify practice strengths that can be built upon during practicum.
- Assess oneself developmentally on a skill-building continuum.
- Assume responsibility for preparing oneself for social work practice.

### CHAPTER OUTLINE

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Structure of Chapters  | 1  |
| Chapter Preview  | 2  |
| Background and Context   | 3  |
| Guidance and Direction   | 6  |
| Self-Assessment of Practice Strengths: A Workbook Activity         | 7  |
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## Ethical and Professional Behavior

**Behavior: Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations.**

**Critical Thinking Question:** Although you are just beginning your practicum, you have some of the strengths a social worker will need. As you complete this self-assessment, identify the strengths you already have.

substitute for a text book, but rather should act as a review of key ideas that set the stage for what follows. The ideas in the *Guidance and Direction* section of each chapter will stimulate creative thinking and raise important questions that need to be considered as you work your way through the practicum. These sections offer general suggestions, guidance, advice, and sometimes even a few specific do's and don'ts intended to encourage and facilitate learning in relation to the chapter's objectives and particular focus.

Several pages of each chapter have been cast into a workbook format and titled *A Workbook Activity*. You will be asked to engage in critical thinking activities and answer questions that will help you integrate knowledge, skills, and values needed for the professional competencies of social work practice. A section titled

*Suggested Learning Activities* lists several specific tasks and activities that provide additional opportunities and experiences for learning.

Each chapter allows for *review and an informal testing* of your understanding of chapter content. Links are provided to a number of multiple-choice and short essay questions designed to help you cement your knowledge.

The *References* section at the end of each chapter lists books, articles, and links related to the topics addressed in the book. These suggestions serve as resources for additional information and encourage a more in-depth examination of the topics presented. Using textbooks and readings from courses you have taken as reference guides will also help you understand how social workers continue to build on their previous knowledge and skills as more advanced practice is expected over time.

## CHAPTER PREVIEW

Congratulations on your entry to the practicum phase of your social work education. In order to help you think about how to maximize this challenge, this introductory chapter presents the concept of practicum as a unique learning experience. Your practicum will offer you the opportunity to review classroom *knowledge*, integrate this knowledge with the *skills* required in the social work profession, and support all your interventions with the *values* of the social work profession. This book will help you bring those three components of practice together. Also covered in this chapter are the *expectations for practicum* of the school, the practicum agency, your clients, and you as a student. You will learn how these expectations converge and how to clarify, understand, and meet them all. Content on the *skill-building continuum* experienced by all social work students and social workers will assist you in placing yourself developmentally along this trajectory with plans for professional development throughout your career. Finally, this chapter provides a tool entitled *Student Self-Assessment of Practice Strengths*, which you can use now and at the conclusion of your practicum to identify and build upon the strengths you bring to the social work practicum.

You are to be commended for embarking on the exciting social work practicum experience and applauded for reaching this stage in your professional education. You have been approved for a practicum based on your academic achievements and your professional

readiness for this experience. The practicum is a unique opportunity to apply what you have learned in the classroom, expand your knowledge, develop your skills, and hone your use of professional values. It is time for you to move from the role of a student to that of a professional social worker. This book is designed to provide you with guidance and structure during the social work practicum. If used in a thoughtful manner throughout the practicum, it will help you make the best of whatever your practicum setting has to offer. It requires a real commitment and a willingness to invest time in the learning process.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The practicum experience is almost universally described by BSW and MSW social work students as the single most important, challenging, significant, and powerful learning experience of their formal social work education. It is in the practicum where the concepts, principles, theories, and models discussed in the classroom come to life because they are being applied with real people in real-life situations. During the practicum, students have the opportunity and responsibility to use and enhance the skills and techniques they previously rehearsed in classroom role-playing and simulations. It is also during the practicum that students make considerable progress in developing self-awareness and come to a better understanding of their individual strengths and limitations as well as the influence of their personal values, attitudes, and life experiences on their practice. The practicum can and should be a time when classroom theory is integrated with social work practice and when students apply the values and fundamental principles of their chosen profession.

You will quickly learn that there are many *stakeholders who have expectations for you and your practicum*. Both clients and professionals with a variety of points of view, experiences, and roles to play will have a stake in your learning. This includes you as the *practicum student*, your university *social work program*, your *agency*, and your *clients*. This combination of people and groups who have a stake in your learning is similar to actual social work practice in which there are also many stakeholders with an investment in the performance of social workers. While you are still a student, it is helpful to understand what those expectations are.

The specific objectives associated with a practicum can be found in your school's practicum manual, in official descriptions of your social work curriculum, and in other documents issued by the social work program. In addition, your faculty supervisors will guide you through the process of meeting your program's expectations for the development of competency. Agencies will have expectations of students, and so will clients. All parties to the practicum are expected to adhere to the *National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics* as well as the expectations for social work programs accredited by the *Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)*.

### Engagement

**Behavior: Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies.**

**Critical Thinking Question:** Now that you have begun your practicum, what is your plan for drawing on the various sources or knowledge gained through your classroom experience?

### Ethical and Professional Behavior

**Behavior: Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context.**

**Critical Thinking Question:** A professional social worker must learn to apply the NASW Code of Ethics to all practice decisions. What can you do to make certain that you understand how to apply the ethical standards of the profession to each practicum assignment given to you?