COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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GERIATRIC SOCIAL WORK INITIATIVE • *Funded by The John A. Hartford Foundation*

Hartford Partnership Program for Aging Education (HPPAE)

Steps to a Successful Rotation

Four Steps to a Successful Rotation

To implement the HPPAE rotational model successfully, follow these four important steps:

1. Educate faculty, staff, and partnership members

Every member of the partnership and its affiliates should understand the concepts and rationale for the HPPAE rotational model. Below are strategies for reaching out to two of the core constituents:

Outreach to Faculty
It is important to educate and engage academic and field faculty who are not directly involved in your HPPAE because:

- They play an advisory role in planning students' learning goals and experiences.

- They will be better prepared to lead classroom discussions when students talk about experiences from the field.

You can inform and engage faculty in individual meetings or group sessions where they have an opportunity to discuss their concerns, issues, and roles. Content for these forums should include:

- A rationale for using the rotational model with students in aging

- A clear relationship of the model to current practice realities

- An explanation of the range of services in the service sector

- Examples of how to use the competencies to plan rotations with students

- An explanation of the relationship between the field rotations and classroom learning.

Outreach to Community Agencies

It is also essential to educate community agencies that serve older adults about the benefits of the HPPAE. This is the first step in recruiting them to be part of the program in their community. These agencies may already be field sites of your school or they may be agencies your school has not historically engaged.

Your outreach should:

- Anticipate that many agencies may initially shy away from the model because of their perception that the HPPAE involves extra work, that the rotations will translate to insufficient time to work with interns, or that client care will suffer.

- Make the case that by being a part of the HPPAE, they are playing an important role in recruiting and training the future workforce, giving students a bigger picture and more sophisticated outlook of the health-care system, and getting direct exposure to a larger and better trained pool of potential future employees.

2. Select agencies to be field sites

Keep these guidelines in mind as you select your field sites:

- The agencies in your university-community partnership will likely serve as field sites for student rotations, but field selection need not be limited to them. Additional sites could be:

    Organizations outside the traditional aging network that reach specific communities or populations, such as ethnic groups

    Advocacy or policy agencies that have not previously participated in educational ventures.

- A site that agrees to be part of the partnership and help implement the HPPAE may not have a placement each and every semester or quarter for students, but may wish to remain actively involved in the partnership.

- A site that wishes to have students placed with them may not take on an active role within the partnership.

- Agencies without MSW-qualified field instructors may also serve as field sites, because they reflect certain workforce settings that may employ social workers who report to non-social workers. In cases like these, however, an offsite MSW-qualified professional from the same or another partnership agency would need to serve as the field instructor.

Criteria for Selecting Agencies for HPPAE Rotations:
Select a wide range of agencies across the aging-care continuum to provide students with good learning opportunities and to ensure adequate representation of the service sector.

The ideal HPPAE agencies fulfill the following:

- Provide services to older adults.

- Have an interest in helping to educate social workers.

- Have experience educating students (you may select agencies that do not have this history, but anticipate that they will need extra support).

- Understand rotations and are willing to participate fully, through work with other agencies and the MSW program via attendance at trainings.

- Employ support staff that is interested in educating students by enlisting them in being field instructors, task supervisors, or preceptors.

3. Individualize rotations based on students' learning goals

Learning goals and rotation plans must be tailored to the individual student because not all students have the same background, level of education, or experience with the aging population. Some students may have worked in a nursing home or in adult protective services prior to returning to school; others may have provided home care to their parents or majored in gerontology in an undergraduate program. Field learning needs to strengthen and supplement knowledge and skills, not duplicate them, and to connect back to the competencies.

A planning discussion should include:

- A review of competencies.
- An assessment of student objectives and experience in relation to the competencies.
- A review of agencies available as field sites.
  Tools that are useful in talking to students about field rotations include:

  - The Geriatric Social Work Competencies
  - The Older Adult Service Matrix
  - A list of agencies available for rotations.

4. **Orient students to agency before placement begins**

Students must know the basics of how rotations work before their first day of fieldwork. Prior to starting any internship, students should receive a program orientation that includes information about:

- How this model differs from the traditional model but remains focused on building practice skills
- How best to take advantage of the diverse learning experiences
- Who to talk to about concerns and problems
- How seminars and other program elements relate to rotations
- Other students in rotations

Several HPPAEs have students participate in a summer internship, class, or seminar that orients them either to their primary agency placement before actually starting the formal internship or to the HPPAE as a whole. Other programs have involved the students in creating their rotations either by choosing among already established groupings or by creating a new site through their own initiative.

Designing a Rotational Model: Essential Questions

As you design a rotational model for your HPPAE and for each individual student, use the following questions as guideposts:

a. What configuration of field placements facilitates the development of all necessary knowledge and skills?

- Which competencies can be gained at each potential placement site?
- How long and how often should a student be at a site to gain specific competencies, while meeting the expectations of the agencies?
- What number of rotations is feasible? What number is optimal? Should rotations be implemented over one or two years?
- Is there sufficient staff time and support to organize and oversee a particular rotational model?

b. Should the rotations be sequential, concurrent, or a combination of both?

- How should the combination of rotations be structured?
- Should combinations be fixed or individualized?
- Should there be stratification of rotations (e.g., a primary and a secondary, a primary and multiple secondary sites)?

c. Which mechanisms need to be established to ensure appropriate communication and supervision?

- Are there appropriate and sufficient communication mechanisms between rotation sites?
- Are there appropriate and sufficient communication mechanisms between the school and the sites, regarding student supervision, curriculum content, and other issues?
- How are students supervised at each of their rotations? Are staff members qualified to serve as field instructors? Is there a need for task supervisors in addition to field instructors?

  Input from agency and field placement staff is essential to the design of the rotational model. Once implementation is underway, mechanisms for feedback including feedback from students must be established.