

# Guidebook for International Field Placements and Student Exchanges

---

**PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION,  
AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Patricia B. Lager  
Sally G. Mathiesen  
Mark E. Rodgers  
Shirley E. Cox**



Council on Social Work Education  
Alexandria, VA

© 2010 Council on Social Work Education

ISBN 978-0-87293-138-1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Guidebook for international field placements and student exchanges: planning, implementation, and sustainability / Patricia B. Lager ... [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-87293-138-1 (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Social service—International cooperation. 2. Globalization—Social aspects. 3. Service learning. 4. Student volunteers in social service. 5. Student exchange programs—International cooperation.

I. Lager, Patricia B. II. Title.

HV41.G945 2010

362.3071'55—dc22

2010032500

FSC smb

# Contents

*Preface* 1

*Acknowledgments* 9

*About the Authors* 11

## CHAPTER 1

The Globalization of Social Work 15

## CHAPTER 2

Current Examples of International Field Placements  
and Student Exchanges 33

## CHAPTER 3

A Model of International Field Placements and  
Student Exchanges 59

## CHAPTER 4

Implementing the Model: Emerging Issues and  
Requisite Skills 83

## CHAPTER 5

Orientation and Preparation of Students 121

## CHAPTER 6

Sustainability: Outcomes and Accountability 141

*Appendix A* 163

*Appendix B* 165

*References* 171

*Index* 177

**SAMPLE FORMS (ON THE ACCOMPANYING CD)**

**Sample Cooperative and Exchange Forms**

- Cooperative Agreement (1 and 2)
- Exchange Agreement (1 and 2)
- Faculty Agreement Template
- Field Education Affiliation Agreement
- Responsibilities Exchange Agreement

**Sample Evaluation Forms**

- BSW Field Evaluation Form (First Semester)
- BSW Field Evaluation Form (Second Semester)
- MSW Second Year Field Evaluation (Fall)
- MSW Second Year Field Evaluation (Winter)
- MSW Final Field Evaluation
- MSW First-Term Field Evaluation
- MSW Initial Midterm Field Evaluation
- Program Evaluation
- Student Discussion Questions
- Student Evaluation of International Experience

**Sample Field Placement Forms**

- International Field Placement Reentry
- Student Agreement
- Field Placement Agency
- International Routing Slip
- Internship Recommendation

**Sample Health Forms**

- Medical Self-Report
- Verification of Medical Clearance

**Sample Learning Objectives Forms**

- Graduate Learning Objectives
- MSW Advanced Field Learning Objectives

**Sample Liability Forms**

- Release of Information
- Release of Liability

Sample Miscellaneous Forms

Administrative Responsibilities

Field Experience Survey

International Travel Checklist

Letter of Recommendation

Student Questionnaire (English)

Student Questionnaire (Spanish)

Student Support and Knowledge Production, Trondheim,  
Norway

Sample Student Application Forms

Application for International Field Placement

Application Process for International Field Placement

International Educational Opportunities Application

International Internship Application

Travel Course Application

Sample Student Educational Contracts Forms

Educational Contract for Clinical Concentration

Educational Contract for Generalist Field Placement

Educational Contract

Sample Syllabi and Assessment Forms

Assignment

Online MSW Field Seminar

Syllabus for MSW Hybrid Seminar



# Preface

The concept of developing international exchanges and field placement opportunities for social work students is growing among U.S. schools of social work. This increasing interest in international placements is evident by the rising numbers of American students completing internships in other countries (Dominelli & Thomas Bernard, 2003; Mathiesen & Lager, 2007; Rai, 2004). In a recent survey of all accredited social work programs within the United States, a total of 94 programs (21.1%) reported having placed either master's- or baccalaureate-level social work students in international placements from 1997 to 2002. The survey also found that social work programs have significantly increased their efforts to develop international field placements, and it is expected that a growing number will need to make informed decisions about how to place students abroad (Panos, P., Pettys, Cox, & Jones-Hart, 2004).

The social work profession has long advocated that social work students learn about cultures other than their own (Engstrom & Jones, 2007). Therefore, many schools recognize the establishment of international placements and exchanges as an important way to enhance cultural competency for students. In addition, there is an increasing awareness of issues relating to globalization that impact the social work field not only in the United States but in other countries as well. There is also a growing body of literature about comparative policies and professional activities that support a rationale for the development of social work educational initiatives abroad, such as international placements and exchanges (Lyons & Ramanathan, 1999).

As Midgley (2001) reports, there are differing opinions as to the success of internationalizing the field, with some social work

educators believing that activities are “haphazard and uncoordinated” (p. 23). Some programs that fail to provide adequate resources and sufficient planning for the development of international internships and exchanges can experience negative outcomes that pose serious risks not only to students, but the social work program, institution, and faculty involved. Others are hindered by upper-level administrators who lack sufficient understanding and knowledge of social work education and international collaboration, therefore instituting barriers that impinge a program’s ability to develop an exemplary educational program abroad.

Because social work is viewed differently in other countries, expectations for the learning experiences students should receive in an international location must also vary. However, the use of a model for placing students abroad that includes a consistent cycle of communication between the parties and the incorporation of facilitating factors for maintaining the placement can provide a systematic approach to the development and sustainability of an international field program. The model presented in this guidebook identifies and describes the necessary components of international placements that not only maximize learning for the student, but also meet the requirements of the field curriculum and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) standards. The predominate theme throughout is the development of sustainable relationships, mutual respect for diversity, and a commitment to the reciprocal exchange of information and knowledge at all levels. Without the establishment of these priorities early in the planning process, the authors contend that serious ramifications can occur not only for the student, but also for the social work program and the profession in general.

In 2006 the National Association of Deans and Directors conducted a survey to gather data on the present “state of the art” among social work programs as they design, develop, and implement overseas field placements (Lager, Leta, & Rodgers, 2007). The results of this survey indicate that varying terminology is being used in relation to international field placements in social

work, such as *service learning*, *study abroad*, and *cultural or language immersion*. All of these experiences differ significantly from international internships, which are highly structured to meet specific learning objectives of a field education program. Service-learning projects provide students the opportunity to volunteer in a particular country, often for a nongovernmental organization or governmental agency in which educational guidelines are not generally used and the experience lacks the learning objectives of an internship. *Study abroad*, a term often used synonymously with international field placements and education abroad, is defined as off-campus education that occurs outside the student's home country (Peterson et al., 2007). However, the term generally relates to any form of international experience, including internships, that leads to a significant academic degree and includes specific learning goals (Peterson et al., 2007). Cultural or language immersion programs usually focus on the development of language or culture proficiency and generally do not include the same learning objectives and outcomes as an internship abroad.

Our efforts throughout this book have focused on inclusiveness. Although we have made every effort to use terms carefully to describe the nature of an international experience, it should be noted that not every term will fit the context of every situation, as we are well aware. One that deserves mention is the use of the words *abroad* and *overseas* to describe an international experience, as in *study abroad* trips. We are aware that some countries will not fit into the category of a location across an ocean, yet they may prove to be valuable international partners. We have retained the use of these terms as they are used by many universities, in the United States and other countries, and we wish to avoid misunderstandings. In summary, *overseas* and *abroad*, from the perspective of international partnerships, may refer to any non-U.S. country.

This guidebook is a source of information for students, faculty, field directors, and field supervisors in social work and other helping professions who are interested in developing sustainable international experiences. It presents a developmental model of

establishing international field placements and includes specific steps to take and roles to consider, with illustrations of real-world examples.

Although the authors have significant combined international experience in a number of different countries, there is no way to capture the range of experiences without hearing from our partners. In an effort to give voice to some who have served as host institutions and/or supervisors, we have integrated their comments throughout the book. Chapters end with a series of questions with responses from social work programs around the globe that are involved in providing international internships and student exchanges. The responses inform readers about the barriers and issues experienced by the institutions in their efforts to partner with programs abroad in establishing and sustaining student exchanges and field placements. Many of these issues are similar to those experienced by domestic programs, such as costs, procedures in establishing and sustaining placements, communication barriers, and student issues. We are indebted to these individuals for their frank input.

In addition to the questions and responses, the CD that accompanies this book provides a collection of sample documents that have been gathered from various social work programs in the United States and abroad. These are not presented as templates for programs to use in establishing international field placements, but rather as guides to be modified to fit the unique policies and procedures of the intended program.

The following overview of the chapters provides a brief review of the historical context of international social work, the rationale and extensive amount of planning required of social work programs in developing and implementing international placements, and factors that affect their sustainability over time.

Chapter 1, “The Globalization of Social Work,” begins by discussing the historical development and roots of international social work, followed by current and future trends in this area. Further discussion addresses the affect of globalization on social work practice and the various globalization forces that have

spawned international concentrations and practice applications within social work and related professions. The chapter culminates in an overview of the growth of literature on international social work, an introduction to the varied examples of programs that currently exist, and information on international internships in other professions.

The first part of chapter 2, “Current Examples of International Field Placements and Student Exchanges,” presents the results of several nationwide surveys of social work programs. This includes the findings of a recent survey of all CSWE-accredited programs and another that details BSW and MSW respondent programs’ involvement in international efforts, their program structures, foci, and range of opportunities. A discussion of other empirical findings is also presented with a focus on areas that are in need of ongoing research to determine the effectiveness of varied models currently being used.

Chapter 3, “A Model of International Field Placements and Student Exchanges,” presents a values-driven model for establishing and maintaining international student internships and exchanges (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007). The fundamental importance of communication in international efforts is emphasized, and a brief description of barriers to communication is provided. The rationale for the model is presented in terms of the degree of interest and activity in international efforts worldwide and the need for a comprehensive model to guide the initiation and continuation of these relationships. The model emphasizes long-term relationships, mutual respect for diversity, and commitment to reciprocity at all stages, with a goal of improving outcomes for all parties. The first section provides a detailed description of the communication cycle that undergirds the process. The seven communication steps essential for successfully establishing contacts between host and guest nation are described. The second section provides an overview of 10 theoretically based facilitating factors that help maintain the international efforts and are consistent with the assumptions of the model and the communication steps.

Chapter 4, “Implementing the Model: Emerging Issues and

Requisite Skills,” focuses on steps for executing the plan and various issues that typically emerge. Examples from the authors’ experiences with a variety of challenges and strategies for successful resolution are used to illustrate the implementation of the model. The chapter begins with the process for establishing the international internship placement and the application of important initial communication steps. The establishment of long-term relationships with international participants at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels requires that the director have a sustained interest and commitment to the process. The chapter then provides a detailed discussion regarding the integrative seminar and a variety of seminar models and accompanying strengths and limitations. The final section elaborates on the posited factors for maintaining international relations and the knowledge and skills needed by a field director, a host supervisor, and students to sustain international field placements. The knowledge and skills reflect the facilitating factors that were presented in chapter 3.

The focus of chapter 5, “Orientation and Preparation of Students,” is on issues that are addressed during a comprehensive planning period prior to placement. General topics include the need for students to understand cultural norms, language skills, health, medical care, financial plans, general safety concerns, and qualities that are likely to lead to student and international placement success.

Chapter 6, “Sustainability: Outcomes and Accountability,” presents information regarding critical areas to be monitored throughout and following the international field placement experience. The first section covers tracking and evaluation of students before, during, and after placement. The importance of communication regarding ethical and liability concerns is highlighted in the next section, followed by specific student safety issues and situations. Safety issues in certain countries can pose serious problems for both students and social work programs. Specific information on how these issues can be addressed during the orientation is discussed, and suggestions on planning a well-developed safety response plan in the event of a local, a national,

or an international incident are provided. The sections are illustrated with examples from the authors' experiences. Finally, the positive outcomes for engaging in international field placements for students, faculty, schools, and the profession of social work are discussed.