

PRAC Proposal – IUPUI  
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**Examining the Role of Doctoral Students in  
Enhancing Social Work Field Education**

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This is a joint proposal by the Indiana University School of Social Work (IUSSW) and the Preparing Future Faculty Program at IUPUI. This proposal seeks funds from the IUPUI Program Review and Assessment Committee (PRAC) for a multi-faceted needs assessment. Upon completion of this assessment project, we intend to use the results to leverage external support for project expansion through the *Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation*, *The Humanities at Work*, *Innovation Awards*.

The overall aim of this assessment project is to inform the discipline as to the importance and value of doctoral students in the field liaison role. The project will identify the training needs of doctoral students supervising baccalaureate and masters' level social work students who are completing internships in community settings. This is an area in which doctoral students do not currently receive training and experience, and yet schools of social work expect that incoming faculty members will function as successful field liaisons as part of their academic responsibilities. There is currently one doctoral student serving as a field liaison in the School of Social Work. We would like to see more doctoral students receive training and experience as field liaisons.

Field practicum is an integral component of social work education. Students are required to fulfill a minimum of 512 hours in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program and 960 in the Master of Social Work (MSW) program at the IUSSW. These requirements exceed the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) requirements of 400 hours for BSW students and 900 for MSW students. The field liaison serves as the contact person between the student and field instruction agency (community partner). The field liaison is responsible for:

- providing consultation to the field instructors about curriculum and course objectives;
- arranging two visits per semester with the field instructor and the student, at least one of which will be in the field agency office, to discuss student progress and assess learning objectives;
- being available for problem-solving as needed to both the field instructor and student;
- communicating with the field instruction coordinator and program director about developments, progress or problems experienced by the field instructors and students;
- consulting with the field instructors concerning evaluation of student performance;
- reviewing and approving the student's written Learning Plan;
- assessing the quality and effectiveness of field instruction in the agency; and
- recommending a final grade to the field instruction coordinator.

The grant funding would support a Project Coordinator who will assess the training needs of social work doctoral students as field liaisons. In the model being investigated doctoral students would be assigned a set number of BSW/MSW interns (and receive compensation from the school per student, per semester.) The Project Coordinator will assess student, field instructor, and field liaison satisfaction with doctoral student involvement. The Coordinator will be a doctoral student in Social Work not serving as a field liaison.

In preparation for this project, a survey was distributed to current faculty and field staff with either direct involvement or declared interest in the field component of social work education in the IUSSW. The following questions were asked:

1. What have been the challenges or difficulties associated with field liaisons?
2. What do you think might be the potential advantages and disadvantages of having qualified doctoral students serve as field liaisons?
3. What training opportunities/resources are available to prepare liaisons for the role?
4. What have students shared about their perceptions of field liaisons?
5. How can the field liaison role be strengthened?

***Illustrative comments of respondents included:***

“I think it would be a great way for doctoral students to get some ‘instructional experience’ and understand the importance of working from established course objectives, evaluating progress and learning about the wide range of social work practice.”

“...doctoral students would have to do considerable training so that they were knowledgeable about the BSW and MSW curriculum and expectations.”

“They [doctoral students] may project an enthusiasm and involvement which, if accompanied by knowledge and skills, could serve students and IUSSW well if they do the job conscientiously and consistently.”

“I think the doctoral liaisons would need to attend the Field Instructor Orientation, as well as a liaison orientation at two or three points during the semester.”

“They [doctoral students] may become a new generation of trained, effective field educators and implement the role effectively as faculty members and can advocate for field education in the future.”

“For those of us interested and committed to helping students link theory to practice in the practicum, it [the role of field liaison] is an interesting and enjoyable role. It is multi-faceted and uses all of my social work skills.”

### ***Summary of Responses:***

Overall, responses were positive with regard to involving doctoral students as field liaisons with five out of the nine participants surveyed providing input. Training was noted as an area of great importance. Respondents also noted the need for ongoing support and consultation. Concern was expressed about doctoral students' understanding of curriculum and course objectives as related to the field experience. Respondents shared that the field liaison meetings offered quarterly would be an important resource for doctoral students in preparing for the field liaison role. In sum, the advantages to doctoral students serving in the field liaison role far outweighed the disadvantages according to respondents.

### ***Aims and Objectives***

- To enhance the field component of BSW and MSW education
- To identify training needs of doctoral students serving as field liaisons
- To enrich the preparation of doctoral students for the field liaison role

### ***Activities of Project Coordinator***

- Assessing the current system of field liaisons at IUSSW
- Gathering preliminary data from focus groups of field instructors, field liaisons, and students
- Investigating existing social work programs (N = 70) in which doctoral students may be serving as field liaisons to find out what training is provided
- Attending field education sessions at the *Council on Social Work Education* Annual Program Meeting to gather current information
- Examining the literature on field education in social work
- Developing an outline of a training protocol

***Measurable Outcomes***

- Summary report of training needs identified from focus groups, interviews, and existing programs
- Outline of training protocol
- Improved knowledge of doctoral students as field liaisons
- Preparation of proposal for external funding

***Assessment Methods***

- Focus groups
- Survey of other schools of social work
- Interviews with students and field instructors

***Use of Preliminary Findings***

- Submission of external grant proposal (*Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation*, May 31, 2003)
- Presentation at the Doctoral and Faculty Exchange – monthly brown bag gathering to discuss topics related to the program
- Presentation to Preparing Future Faculty (IUPUI PFF) Advisory Council and National PFF audience
- Submission of abstract to the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)
- Recruitment of doctoral students
- Inform doctoral program curriculum development

***Proposed Schedule***

- January 2003 - Hire Coordinator  
Obtain IRB exemption  
Organize Focus Groups
- February - Attend field education sessions at CSWE Annual Program Meeting  
- Solicit data from other schools of social work on liaison role
- March - Conduct Focus Groups and interviews:  
Students  
Faculty  
Field Instructors
- April - Analyze Focus Groups and interview findings
- May - Use preliminary data to submit Woodrow Wilson grant proposal

***Budget - \$2,000***

- Coordinator \$300. monthly x 5 months = \$1500.
- Focus Groups (3 groups x 10 individuals, \$10. box lunch) = \$300.
- Travel Expense for CSWE conference registration for Coordinator (student member fee) = \$200.

Monthly Coordinator Stipend (Jan. – May, 2003)	= \$1500.
Focus Group hospitality	= 300.
Conference Registration	= <u>200.</u>
Total	\$2,000.

In- kind Match IUSSW:

Consultation provided by Director, Ph.D. Program and Director, Preparing Future Faculty.

Project Coordinator (PhD Student) would receive matching support from IUSSW.

Office Supplies and Office Space: Printing of evaluations, Focus Group materials, and reports.