Once the field supervisor establishes a baseline assessment of the field student, the next step is to identify appropriate learning tasks. However, in identifying student tasks, the supervisor needs to understand adult learning styles and individual preferences. Not everyone learns in the same way—consideration must be given to special needs, the educational context, and a preferred style of learning. Therefore, it is important to explore using a variety of learning experiences for the student. All learning experiences should enhance the student’s ability to meet his/her educational objectives.

The following is a list of learning experiences to help stimulate thinking about identifying learning experiences for social work students. This list is not exhaustive, some of the items may not apply to your setting, and there may be additional learning opportunities unique to your specific agency/organization or area of practice to consider.


Have the student:

1. Read case records, committee meeting minutes, and agency reports/newsletters/webpage.

2. Read journal articles and review websites pertaining specifically to the agency/organization or area of practice.

3. Observe the field supervisor or other appropriate agency personnel in interactions with clients, colleagues, and other community organizations. Prepare a summary or assessment of the interaction. Write an assessment of the client.

4. Listen to a tape-recorded interaction or lecture or watch an audio-visual presentation. Prepare a critique for discussion.

5. Attend a meeting (e.g., staff/team, agency committee, agency board, community group). Take notes on the dynamics of the discussion. Provide a written summary of the content.

6. Visit the agency in the evening or on weekends to observe agency activities during these “off-hour” times.
7. Audio- or video-tape an interaction with a client. Review and critique it.

8. Interview the field supervisor and take a social history. Discuss the interview process.

9. Sit in the waiting area and observe the atmosphere, behaviors of individuals, and interactions between clients and staff.

10. Be responsible for a caseload of clients (number assigned may vary based on responsibilities involved and School of Social Work requirements). Conduct interviews with clients and provide direct services.

11. Visit other community agencies and organizations (e.g., referral sources, collaborative partners).

12. Attend a court hearing.

13. Attend related professional workshops, seminars, and lectures in the community.

14. Attend in-service staff development programs.

15. Prepare an in-service staff development program.

16. Co-facilitate or lead a group. Participate in the pre-planning.

17. Co-facilitate or lead a meeting. Participate in the pre-planning.

18. Go out on home visits. Conduct or participate in the interview.

19. Take on-call (after hours) responsibilities.

20. Role play with the field supervisor to try out new skills and techniques.

21. Participate in orienting new students or staff to the agency/organization.

22. Keep a daily log of experiences and reactions to them. Use a critical thinking approach in reflecting on the experiences.

23. Prepare a process recording of an individual interaction, group session, meeting, or telephone contact.

24. Participate in a one-way mirror observation as an observer or as a subject.

25. Interview administrators, managers, or other staff to gather specific information about their roles.
26. Assist in writing or revising the agency’s policy and procedures manual.

27. Assist in writing or revising the agency’s manual/resource file for student interns.

28. Assist in gathering information for and prepare an annual program or agency budget.

29. Develop, or assist in developing, a grant proposal.

30. Identify new funding opportunities.

31. Assist in writing a newsletter. Prepare a webpage item.

32. Assist with a marketing or public relations project.

33. Participate on an agency committee to plan an event (e.g., fund-raising, educational workshop, community activity).

34. Develop outcome measures for a program or special project.

35. Design and conduct a research project.

Don’t forget your “wish list” of activities you have on your Things To Do list (written or otherwise) that could match well with the student’s educational objectives. These activities may be great learning opportunities for the student. For example, that coalition meeting you never have time for may be perfect for your student. Perhaps your student can update the agency’s community resources directory. What about those clients who need a follow-up phone call after having received services from your agency? Even within the parameters of educational objectives, you can be creative in identifying learning experiences for the social work intern.
## STAGES OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN FIELD EDUCATION

### Stage 1: Beginning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Features</th>
<th>Student Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Acts like a stranger, then a guest</td>
<td>• Safe place to share concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feels vulnerable and self conscious</td>
<td>• Discuss feelings with field supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enthusiastic yet fearful and anxious</td>
<td>• Planned introduction and orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;How soon can I start? When will I get my first case?&quot;</td>
<td>• Permission to be learner; understand individual learning style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stressful meeting supervisor and other staff</td>
<td>• Build self awareness of strengths and limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unknown expectations</td>
<td>• Identify support systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focused/specific learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Skills for using supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Stage 2: Reality Confrontation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Features</th>
<th>Student Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cognitive dissonance re: realistic vs. unrealistic expectations</td>
<td>• Access to peers, field supervisor, faculty liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disillusioned with classroom learning</td>
<td>• Stress management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;Do I want to do this?&quot;</td>
<td>• Time to examine expectations of him/herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;Will I be any good?&quot;</td>
<td>• Permission to take risks, make &quot;mistakes&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experiences value dilemmas</td>
<td>• Skills in negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May overreact to negative feedback</td>
<td>• Self-evaluation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May want to give up or change placement</td>
<td>• Support in identifying discomforts, handle problems and issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• May become physically ill or depressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage 3: Relative Mastery

**Developmental Features**
- Reaches a compromise between expectations and reality
- Open to discussing value/ethical dilemmas
- Establishes level of competence
- Able to set boundaries (able to “leave it at the agency”); able to separate personal and professional
- Establishes level of confidence
- Takes initiative

**Student Needs**
- Identify new challenges
- Provide support in taking initiative
- Depth in supervisory relationship
- Evaluation of self and one’s practice
- Identify strengths and interests
- Identify areas of continued growth

Stage 4: Closure

**Developmental Features**
- Confident; looks forward to next experiences
- Feelings of sadness, relief, withdrawal, detachment
- Termination issues
- Readiness to move on
- Graduating student: reappearance of self doubt, job search demands

**Student Needs**
- Develop an ending plan (start early)
- Reflect on past experiences with endings
- Share feelings with peers, field supervisor, faculty liaison
- Evaluate personal and professional growth
- Evaluate field placement site

Adapted from Cochrane, S. & Thornton, S. Material presented at CSWE Faculty Development Institute, “Developing and Strengthening Quality Field Programs.” Orlando, Florida. (March 5, 1998)
Baseline Assessment and Methods of Evaluation

Baseline Assessment

Knowing what one needs to learn is an obvious prerequisite to achieving professional mastery. The student achieves such mastery through engagement in self-assessment and the supervisor’s assessment, and subsequent written evaluation, of the student’s abilities and performance.

It is important for the field supervisor to have a sense of the knowledge and skills a student brings to the field placement. The initial challenge to the field supervisor is figuring out the student’s level of competence at the beginning of the field placement. Students come with a range of experiences and nothing should be assumed or predetermined prior to the student’s arrival at the field site. Sometimes a BSW student may have had more experience than a first-year MSW student. In addition, the amount of experience alone does not guarantee competency. Therefore, each student should have an individualized baseline assessment. From this baseline data, the field supervisor and student can develop a plan to provide learning opportunities that fit with the individual student.

Some suggestions for establishing a baseline assessment of the student’s abilities:

- have the student write a brief summary of his/her strengths and weaknesses
- have the student observe your practice—discuss the student’s observations about the client, the problem situation, assessment and intervention, social work roles, values and ethics, etc.
- have the student write a summary of an observed transaction between client and field supervisor
- observe the student’s practice of beginning-level tasks
- assess the student’s verbal communication skills through role play situations
- assess the student’s written communication skills through case summary, letter, meeting notes, etc. using the format required by the agency
Methods of Evaluation

Evaluation of student performance is an ongoing, interactive process between student and supervisor culminating in an end-of-semester written evaluation. For a fair and complete assessment of student performance, the field supervisor should employ a variety of measures along with the repetition of such measures. This approach will increase accuracy and fairness in evaluating student performance and provide the field supervisor with more opportunities to offer professional direction, guidance, and specific feedback. Listed below are methods of evaluation that can be made use of over the course of the field placement to evaluate the student’s performance as related to the educational outcomes in the learning contract and the final evaluation instrument. Methods of evaluation include (but are not limited to):

1. **Observation**
   Direct observation of a student allows for direct assessment on all aspects of a student’s interviewing skills. While students may feel uncomfortable at this prospect, most realize that it is an invaluable opportunity to gain feedback. One suggestion is to phase in observation by starting with the student observing the field supervisor and processing what took place, then conducting a joint interview followed by discussion, and, finally, the field supervisor observing the student conducting an interview.

2. **Role Play**
   Simulating placement-specific situations can be used to identify the student’s strengths and weaknesses. A role play can be used to deal with challenges and obstacles that confront a student in practice. For a role play to be most beneficial, it should be carefully planned and structured. Some field supervisors use role play situations to develop benchmarks for specific skills and to determine assignment of student tasks.

3. **Case/Tasks Summary**
   The student’s ability to apply social work knowledge, skills, and values to practice can be assessed through a written case/task summary. Multiple summaries over time offer an opportunity to view how the student gathers and organizes information, makes assessments, sets goals, and identifies appropriate interventions. Through a written summary, the student’s writing abilities, familiarity with professional style, and ability to be clear and concise while highlighting significant data can be demonstrated. A case/task summary may be required agency practice or requested specifically by the field supervisor as a method of student evaluation.
4. **Process Recording**
This type of recording is specifically used for teaching purposes. Most of the time it is not placed in agency records. The process recording is a verbatim documentation of an interaction between the student and a client or a transaction between the student and another worker (e.g., information gathering on a project). It requires the student to write down both the verbal and non-verbal communications of the student’s interactions along with the student’s reflections and analysis. Although somewhat tedious, the process recording is a very effective method for assessing the student’s professional skills, knowledge, and values. The student engages in self-assessment and, in addition, receives feedback from the field supervisor. Two or three process recordings per semester are suggested.

5. **Video/Audio Taping**
The use of video and audio taping allows for an extensive evaluation of the student’s performance by the supervisor and provides an opportunity for self-evaluation. Both strengths and weaknesses can be identified. A student may be asked to submit a self-evaluation with the actual tape prior to the supervisor’s critique. Clearly, field supervisors must be selective about the transactions students are allowed to tape. The student must follow agency protocol in securing client permission to video or audiotape. Such protocol must include the acknowledgement of voluntary client participation in taping with continuation of receiving services not contingent upon participating, the educational purposes of taping, and tape disposal.

6. **Forms, Reports, Professional Letters, and Additional Disseminated Materials**
A student’s ability to write clearly and professionally, retrieve information from a variety of sources, and organize material in writing is intrinsic to the process of evaluating a student’s performance. It is helpful to offer opportunities for the student to write, in full or in part, court reports, grants, reports to funding sources, intakes, newsletter articles, program/agency descriptions for brochures/websites, informational handouts for clients, letters, etc. Although field supervisors may be able to complete forms by rote, this is a new task for the student. Having the student fill out forms can provide the field supervisor with information about the student’s knowledge of the agency, ability to gather data, basic writing skills, and ability to focus on purpose of the task.

7. **Written Assignments**
In addition to the variety of written items as part of routine agency practice, the field supervisor may ask the student to complete a written assignment in order to assess the student’s knowledge, values, and/or skills. Such assignments may be in addition to any assignments the student must complete for field seminar. A student and field supervisor may agree to use a required
field seminar assignment (e.g., agency summary, critiques of articles, daily/weekly logs, process recording) for evaluation purposes as well.

8. **Staff Presentation**
   The student’s ability to gather, organize, and verbally present information can be evaluated through the student’s participation in agency meetings (e.g., staff, program, committee) and community opportunities (e.g., meetings, special events/projects, collaboratives). As an active participant, the student is not only able to increase his/her understanding of the agency, the community, and their interrelatedness, but is able to enhance his/her sense of professional self and connection to the agency.

9. **Supervisory Conference**
   Weekly formal supervision enables the student to process his/her tasks and field experiences on a regular basis. Initially, the field supervisor may set the structure for the supervisory conference, but eventually the student should take on more responsibility in preparing an agenda and identifying challenging situations. Through the supervisor’s support and constructive criticism, there should be evidence of the student’s professional growth. It is recommended that both the supervisor and the student maintain written summaries of supervisory sessions to be used in completing the student’s final written evaluation.

10. **Feedback from Others**
    Most students have the opportunity to work with agency staff in addition to the primary field supervisor. Some students may be assigned task supervisors. Other students may work on a joint project with a professional from another agency. In any case, a student will benefit from being given the opportunity to work with others, each with his/her own professional style. In addition, feedback from these other professionals can be useful in assessing student performance. The field supervisor should build in a mechanism for obtaining such feedback.

11. **Student Self-Report**
    The student’s ability to recognize his/her strengths and limitations, personal biases/prejudices, and areas of professional growth are critical to the educational process. The final evaluation form may be used as a pre- and post-test measure to observe how the student evaluates his/her performance over time in the field placement. The supervisor may ask the student for a written self-assessment separate from the final evaluation.