

Peer Supervision: Preparing Social Work Students to Thrive in an Evolving Workforce

Ticola Ross and Frances Ferrante
UNC Charlotte School of Social Work

November 1, 2018

Abstract

This study will serve as a pilot and evaluation model for peer supervision amongst undergraduate and foundation year graduate social work students who are participating in internships required by the UNC Charlotte School of Social Work. Specific to social work internships, students are required to attend weekly supervision meetings with a degreed and experienced supervisor. While supervision in the aforementioned terms are required, the project seeks to evaluate alternative means for preparing students for post-graduation careers. Peer supervision is often utilized by social work professionals as means for professional development and described as "...any facilitated, planned or ad hoc interactions with colleagues of similar experiences levels...for the purposes of clinical training, professional development, and mutual aid and affinity" (Golia & McGovern n.d.). This study seeks to evaluate peer supervision as a tool to support students and enhance their internship experience. In the ever-changing workforce, students are frequently faced with new demands and barriers to learning. The pilot peer supervision model aims to provide peer support through peer group interactions, increase the student's confidence in critical thinking abilities, assist in developing their professional skills, and, to evaluate student's perceived usefulness of this model. While evaluation of this pilot will take place within the social work program, the information gathered from this project may be useful to other disciplines at UNC Charlotte that require internships. Results from this project will be disseminated to the UNC Charlotte community and to other social work programs at the state and national levels.

Budget Request Page
January 15, 2019 to May 30, 2020

BUDGET: Request by budget category. Joint proposers must select one PI to be the lead and one department to receive this allocation.

Lead Principal Investigator: Dr. Ticola C. Ross

Principal Investigator 800#: 800137890

Title of Project: Peer Supervision: Preparing Social Work Students to Thrive in an Evolving Workforce

Allocate operating budget to Department of: School of Social Work _____

Fiscal Year One (January 15, 2019 to May 30, 2019)		
Faculty Stipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2019	\$7700
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	\$2400
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	\$1380
925000	Domestic Travel	
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	

942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
Year One Subtotal		\$11,480

Lead Principal Investigator: Dr. Ticola C. Ross_____		
Fiscal Year Two (July 1, 2019 to May 30, 2020)		
Faculty Stipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2020	
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages (see PD-17)	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	
925000	Domestic Travel	\$2,500
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	

930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
Year Two Subtotal		\$2,500
TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED (Year One + Year Two)		\$13,980

SoTL Proposals that do not receive SoTL funds may be eligible for support from the Office of Assessment and Accreditation. If your SoTL proposal is not recommended for funding, would you like for your proposal to be shared with the Office of Assessment for review and consideration for funding from that office? YES NO

Budget Narrative

Faculty Stipend: Ticola Ross and Frances Ferrante will receive \$3,850 each as a faculty stipend for fiscal year one. The total salary amount will be \$7,700.

Graduate Student Salary: One graduate student will be hired and trained to assist with data collection and analysis at \$15 per hour for the the Spring 2019 In the Spring 2019 semester the graduate student will work 10 hours per week for a 16 week semester total of \$2,400.

Subject Incentive Fee: For the online survey, an estimated 110 subjects will participate and receive a \$5 gift card for the pretest and an additional \$5 gift card for the post test. For the focus group, 14 subjects will receive a \$10 gift card for the pre focus group and a \$10 gift card for the post focus group. The total cost of subject incentives is \$1,380.

Domestic Travel: The research findings will be presented to other social work scholars at the Fall 2019 Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting and North Carolina Field Education Consortium. The estimated hotel and meals cost is \$500, registration \$600, and transportation is \$800. The total cost for both PI's to travel to the conferences is \$2,500.



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November 1, 2018

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Grants Committee
Center for Teaching and Learning
UNC Charlotte
9201 University Boulevard
Charlotte, NC 28223

Dear SOTL Grant Committee:

It is my pleasure to write a letter of support for the 2018-2019 SOTL Grant Proposal, “Peer Supervision: Preparing Social Work Students to Thrive in an Evolving Workforce” submitted by Ticola Ross, PhD, MSW, LCSWA and Frances Ferrante, MSW, LCSW. This project will assess the use of peer supervision within our unit as an avenue to increase peer support, develop student’s confidence in their critical thinking skills, advance student professionalism and ultimately increase student satisfaction with field practicum experiences. Field practicum is the signature pedagogy of social work education, granting students the opportunity to apply learned social work knowledge into practice. Projects such as this one encourages innovative means to engage students and support them in their academic programs.

I anticipate that this project will result in several benefits to our school. First, the implementation of these peer supervision groups may encourage increased levels of support amongst the social work cohorts. Practicing social workers are often encouraged to engage in consultation with colleagues for support however; this type of support is not regularly implemented in academic programs for social work trainees. We anticipate that peer supervision will provide an added support to encourage them to remain in their rigorous academic program. Post-graduation, our students may continue to value the peer supervision experience and begin to utilize it throughout their career; which may ultimately assist them to remain in the profession. Increased student support could encourage students to remain enrolled, thus increasing college retention.

Peer supervision groups will encourage professional growth, as students will utilize these groups to share knowledge and resources. Students will be able to use peer supervision to process field experiences with others at their same experience level; giving a neutral outlet for professional expression and encourage critical thinking. While participating in these groups, students will be indirectly exposed to the diverse practicum experiences of their cohort, which reflects the mission of the UNCC School of Social Work. These practicum experiences include

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work with diverse populations, individual and community practice, policy work and social work research. Exposure to these experiences will help students to expand their professional view and further assist them to prepare for practice.

This project could be a valuable asset to other accredited social work programs. Dr. Ross and Professor Ferrante would have the opportunity to share this research with other social work educators who may be interested in implementing this student learning approach. The implementation of this work at other social work schools could result in the previously discussed benefits to student social workers at the national level.

I am confident that this project researching the benefits of peer supervision will bring advancement to the field of social work and advance the mission of the UNCC School of Social Work. Furthermore, this project has the potential to have campus-wide impact on various internship programs, strengthening the student academic experience.

Sincerely,

Schnavia Smith Hatcher
Director, School of Social Work

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Project Narrative (word count 2,384)

Specific Aims

With increased work demands, technology innovations and barriers, and intergenerational dynamics, the workplace is quickly evolving (Fishman, 2016; SHRM, 2016). The Society for Human Resource Management (2016) found that co-worker support was one of seven factors that contribute to an effective work environment and can assist with the challenges of an evolving workplace. Within student internships, peer support functions in a similar way providing additional reinforcement, yet there are a lack of formal approaches to teach students to engage in structured peer supervision (Aston & Molassiostis, 2002). Thus, fostering peer supervision will provide students with structured support in an internship setting.

Internships provide students with practical hands-on experiences that socialize them into their profession (Royse, Dhooper, & Badger, 2018). Additionally, research suggest that internships are beneficial to several stakeholders such as students, departments, and employers. For instance, students are better prepared for the workforce, develop leadership traits, and more competitive after graduation. Moreover, college departments receive benefits in enrollment and their connection to the community, while employers are able to more easily hire qualified and trained staff (Devine, Linrud, Miller & Wilson, 2007).

Overall Purpose

The overall purpose for fostering peer supervision is to provide students with a structured process for connecting with other students for support and to enhance their internship experience. This will be executed via the Foundations Field Seminar Social Work course, where students will be engage in peer supervision modules covering peer social support, critical thinking, and professionalism.

Specific Objectives:

- A. Learning Objective #1: Peer Social Support - *To create a forum for reciprocal peer support that enhances the internship experience.*

Peer supervision groups will designate a built in support system for students completing internships. Within the parameters of the group, students will be able to connect professionally with others to discuss their field learning as well as challenges they may be facing. For each meeting, students should be prepared to discuss relevant internship experiences and challenges. Students may feel a level of vulnerability in sharing their experiences however; it is encouraged that support and experience sharing be *reciprocated*.

- B. Learning Objective #2: Confidence in Critical Thinking - *To enhance student ability to confidently assess and problem solve internship related issues.*

Peer supervision groups encourage dialogue between students that identifies internship issues and dilemmas. Feedback from the peer supervision group will focus on assisting the student to think strategically about these issues and dilemmas and to identify steps to address them.

- C. Learning Objective #3: Professionalism - *To further develop the professional skill set needed to flourish in their discipline.*

Although peer supervision will take place between students (those who share similar academic experience levels), students will be expected to engage with a professional demeanor. Peer supervision groups will inadvertently review the student's use of classroom learned skills, while discussing how these are applied to situations encountered in their internships.

- D. Learning Objective #4: Peer Supervision - *Students will learn and understand the usefulness of peer supervision.*

Students will learn about the structure of peer supervision and engage in this practice throughout one academic term. Integration of peer supervision into their repertoire can be utilized throughout their social work careers.

Specific Research Questions

1. Will peer supervision impact student's level of peer support, critical thinking skills and professionalism?
2. To what extent does the foundational social work field seminar course impact the knowledge and usefulness of peer supervision?

Rationale for Project

The School of Social Work Field Education Office is aware of the changing landscape for students in internships and work settings and desires to enhance the field seminar courses that are designed to support students in internship. Last spring an internal evaluation of the internship courses revealed that students found the course to be redundant and lack direct application to their field experiences. Moreover, students cited that they would prefer more professional development and group processing time with their classmates. Although peer support occurs informally with students (Butterworth, 1998), structured models for peer supervision are rare (Aston & Molassiostis, 2002). This SoTL proposal provides an opportunity for students to learn to structure peer supervision to enhance peer support, critical thinking, and professionalism.

This SoTL proposal will impact undergraduate and graduate teaching and learning in three ways. First, this project has the capacity to impact both undergraduate and graduate students across disciplines on UNC Charlotte campus. According to the UNC Charlotte University Career Center (2018), here on campus, academic undergraduate and graduate internships are offered across all colleges with 45 required and 124 voluntary options. Within the College of Health and Human Services, which emphasizes health promotion within communities, there are five units with internship opportunities: nursing, athletic training, public health, kinesiology, and social work. With large numbers of internships across campus this project has the potential to be applicable across diverse disciplines on UNC Charlotte's campus.

Second, for the discipline of social work, internships date back to its origins and is often called the "Signature Pedagogy" where students are able to "...integrate the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting" (CSWE, 2015, p.12). Each

year the UNC Charlotte's School of Social Work provides over 225 students with internship opportunities and combined students earn over 100,000 hours at their internship. Social work internships are evolving as well, with updated Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2015) and increasing interest in distance education (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018).

Finally, this project will add the scholarly literature on supervision as most of the research emphasizes the role of supervisor and employer/student supervision, whereas peer supervision has been overshadowed, this proposal will highlight the usefulness peers supporting each other.

Literature Review

Supervision and Peer Supervision. Supervision is a significant training tool in many practice fields and typically refers to training that takes place within a supervisor/supervisee relationship. According to the National Association of Social Workers and Association of Social Work Boards (2013) "The supervisor is responsible for providing direction to the supervisee, who applies social work theory, standardized knowledge, skills, competency, and applicable ethical content in the practice setting". Supervision in the field of social work is a customary practice, and utilized as a catalyst for guiding professional social work behavior.

Unlike supervision between a supervisor and supervisee, peer supervision offers professionals the chance to consult with and receive feedback from their peers. Peer supervision is described as "...any facilitated, planned or ad hoc interactions with colleagues of similar experiences levels...for the purposes of clinical training, professional development, and mutual aid and affinity" (Golia & McGovern, n.d.). While vast research on the benefits of supervision is available, there is limited research on peer supervision, particularly peer supervision at the undergraduate and graduate level. According to, Golia and McGovern (n.d.) "...peer supervision can foster the establishment of mutual aid and

affinity among peers, the development of professional autonomy and empowerment, and feelings of motivation and shared responsibility...”. Aligning with this, the evaluation of our model will assess how peer supervision provides professional development and support to students in their internships.

Peer Social Support. Numerous studies have found social support to serve as a catalyst for well-being and adjustment to college life (Cutrona, 1982; McGrath, 1999). In addition, recent research has found social support to even play in role in use of social media (Tennant, Demaray, Coyle, and Malecki, 2015). Social Support can be defined as an individual’s perceived social network that offers beneficial aid before, during, and after stressful events (McGrath, 1999). The use of peer social support in peer supervision could assist students with what Caplan (1974) termed the key elements of social support. For example, teaching students to help with material aids such as educating a peer about a difficult assignment, task sharing such as working collectively on a group project and controlling emotions such as comforting a peer when they receive unfavorable feedback.

Critical Thinking. Social Work students tend to work with vulnerable populations that are often in crisis. Situations such as these call for a special attention to critical thinking. Often referenced as “good decision making” critical thinking involves exploring an issue that does not have a specific or logical outcome (Kurfiss, 1989; Mumm & Kersting, 1997). Prior research suggest that working with others in a shared space improves critical thinking abilities (Gokhale, 1995).

Professionalism. Professional behavior is frequently emphasized in social work education. In a study comparing how various occupations viewed professionalism, social work students “...described the primary purpose of their professional education in terms of acquiring the skills and qualifications needed to obtain and be successful in a job” (Blair, 2016). While the classroom setting educates students on social work roles, theories, and practice standards; concurrent internships, and supervision, complements the classroom component. In supervision and peer supervision, the students have the opportunity to

encounter professional training and consultation in which social work skills are reviewed, strengthened, and reinforced.

Methods

Design. A pre-post sequential mixed methods research design will be employed to investigate peer supervision involving online surveys and focus groups.

Participants. Foundation level BSW and MSW Students enrolled in Foundation Social Work Field course II in Spring 2019 will be invited to participate in the study. The course accompanies an 16-hour per week internship and meets face-to-face weekly. An estimated 110 students will participate. Peer supervision modules will be taught by trained field education faculty.

Procedure. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval and beginning in Spring 2019, an estimated 110 students will receive an email request to participate in an online survey housed in the secure Qualtrics platform to share their responses related to peer social support, confidence in critical thinking, professionalism, satisfaction in field, and demographics. After the students complete the survey they will be redirected to another secure website to receive their \$5 gift card. At the same time 14 of the 110 students will be randomly selected to participate in one of two focus groups to discuss their knowledge and understanding of peer supervision. The focus group participants will receive a \$10 gift card. After the data is collected the students will have exposure to the peer supervision modules through their year long face-to-face Foundation Social Work Field Seminar course that is also accompanied by a 16-hour per week social work internship. The courses will be taught by trained social work staff that will follow-up with the peer supervision approach. At the end of the spring 2019 term the participants will take the post survey and the same focus group participants will engage in an additional post focus group and receive a \$10 gift card.

Evaluation

Survey. To investigate research question one, *whether peer supervision will impact level of peer support, critical thinking skills, and professionalism*, students will take an online survey covering Peer Social

Support, Confidence in Critical Thinking, Professionalism, Satisfaction of field, and basic demographics.

A modified version of the College Student Social Support Scale developed by McGarth (1999) will be used to assess level of peer support. To evaluate confidence a 0 (no confidence at all) to 10 (completely confident) will be used to assess the student's level of confidence in solving social work tasks.

Professionalism will be assessed using a Likert Scale reviewing the areas of integrity, time management, respect, professional interaction, and communication. To provide context for the students' internship experiences, the Satisfaction with Field Placement (Fortune, Feathers, Rook, Scrimenti, Smollen, et al., 1985) assessment will be utilized. Finally, a brief demographic tool will be used.

Focus Groups. The address research question two: *To what extent does the foundational social work field seminar course impact the knowledge and usefulness of peer supervision?* Two pre and post focus groups will be conducted with 14 randomly selected students that are enrolled in the course. The focus group will be audio-recorded and last about one-hour. The PI's will lead the focus groups in a discussion about their perceptions about peer supervision.

Knowledge of Dissemination

Knowledge dissemination of this work will take place at a variety of levels and settings. Several academic programs at UNCC require field practicum internships; thus the knowledge gained through this project could be applicable to other academic programs. Other academic programs at UNCC may be able to adopt similar peer supervision approaches in order to enhance student learning.

Our proposal, research, and findings will also be presented during related SoTL events in 2019. The knowledge gained through this work will also be disseminated to other schools of social work at the state level through the North Carolina Field Educators Consortium (NC-FEC) and nationally at the Council on Social Work Education yearly programs.

At the conclusion of this study, we anticipate the ability to develop manuscripts and further expand on peer supervision for social work students. These manuscripts will be submitted to the Journal of Social Work Education, the Journal of Teaching in Social Work and Field Educator. The manuscripts will identify ways to improve internship satisfaction, as well as best practices for developing student

confidence in their critical thinking skills in social work settings. With consideration to the world's evolving workforce, we anticipate that this research will assist us to formulate manuscripts related to utilizing peer supervision as an effective tool to develop career professionalism.

Human Subjects

Once we are notified of funding, we will seek IRB approval in December of 2019.

Extramural Funding

We are not seeking extramural funding at this time. Contingent on the outcomes and results of the peer supervision pilot, we will consider extramural funding for long term study from the Spencer Foundation with the Lyle Spencer Research Award for Advancing Understanding of Education Practice and Its Improvements.

Timeline

Fall 2018:

- Application will be submitted to UNC Charlotte IRB once investigators are notified of funding
- Interview and hire graduate assistant for Spring 2019

Spring 2019:

- January 2019- Administer pretest survey and conduct pre focus groups
- March 2019- Submit abstract for CSWE Conference and NC Field Education Consortium
- April 2019- Administer post-test survey and conduct post focus groups

Summer 2019:

- May 2019-Analyze data and prepare final report
- June 2019- Submit final report to Center for Teaching and Learning

Fall 2019:

- Present project at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting and NC Field Education Consortium
- Prepare manuscript for submission to *Journal of Social Work Education*, *Field Educator* and the *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*

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