Gatekeeping in the Practicum: What Field Instructors Need to Know

Jaclyn Miller
Beverly B. Koerin

ABSTRACT. Gatekeeping is a process in professional education designed to ensure that those who graduate are capable of interacting with clients, colleagues, and the community in an ethical and competent manner. Field instructors and clinical supervisors, as partners in the educational process, carry gatekeeping responsibilities as well as teaching and mentoring and yet receive little training for this critical function. The framework presented in this paper offers field instructors and supervisors a systematic way of preparing for gatekeeping. It also provides guidance to professional programs for developing training. The framework addresses macro, mezzo and micro level gatekeeping knowledge and skills related to the practicum. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Gatekeeping, field instruction, practicum evaluation, clinical supervision

INTRODUCTION

Field instructors, as partners in the social work education process, share the responsibility for ensuring that students who graduate from BSW and MSW

Jaclyn Miller, PhD, LCSW, is Associate Professor and Director of Field Instruction, School of Social Work, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1001 W. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23284-2027 (E-mail: jmiller@atlas.vcu.edu).

Beverly B. Koerin, PhD, is Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1001 W. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23284-2027 (E-mail: bbkoerin@vcu.edu).

1

programs are prepared to be competent and ethical practitioners. Competence and professional suitability encompass more than the student's acquisition of a knowledge and skill base; factors such as personal characteristics, values, and personal experiences have also been identified as elements of professional suitability. In social work, concerns have been raised about these factors in articles that have come to be referred to as the "gatekeeping" literature (Cobb & Jordan, 1989; Cole & Lewis, 1993; Hepler & Noble, 1990; Gibbs, 1992, 1994; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Miller & Koerin, 1998; Moore & Urwin, 1990, 1991; Peterman & Blake, 1986). In other disciplines, similar concerns and recognition of the importance of the gatekeeping role can be found in the literature on supervision (e.g., Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Watkins, 1999).

The ultimate purpose of gatekeeping, and the rationale for this accumulated literature, is to develop criteria, guidelines, and procedures by which the profession can maximize the likelihood that those who begin the practice of social work are capable of interacting with clients, colleagues, and the community in an ethical and competent manner. The intersection of ethics and gatekeeping was made clear in Strom-Gottfried's (2000) analysis of the National Association of Social Worker's (NASW) ethics complaints from 1986 to 1997. She found "a portion of the social work education cases referred to NASW were related to gatekeeping, both in the reporting of behaviors that would make a student 'unsuitable' and in complaints arising from the unfair or inept application of gatekeeping efforts" (p. 251).

While gatekeeping is an on-going process that occurs at admission, through evaluation of student performance in class and field, and at points of counseling out or termination (Miller & Koerin, 1998), the collective wisdom in social work education seems to include a tacit assumption that the ultimate locus of gatekeeping is in the field practicum and thus a function of the field instructor (Coleman, Collins, & Aikens, 1995; Gibbs, 1992). This assumption has been stated explicitly: "Now more than ever before, expectations are being placed on the supervisory relationships between social work students and social work field instructors as the major vehicles in the preparation of competent social workers" (Abbott & Lyter, 1998, pp. 43-44). Such a statement makes it all the more curious that no articles in the social work literature directly focus on defining and developing this critical aspect of the field instructor role. This paper addresses this critical topic by integrating the general gatekeeping literature and the overlapping literatures on student problems in the practicum and the field evaluation process. It focuses specifically on field instructors' gatekeeping function and presents a framework that includes macro, mezzo and micro aspects of knowledge and skills that field instructors ought to access and develop.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gatekeeping: Admission and Termination

Gatekeeping in social work begins with the admission process in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Perhaps as a result of this "first step," the gatekeeping research has focused mainly on such purely academic criteria as undergraduate grade point average and scores on standardized tests, yielding limited information on other criteria important in screening applicants' suitability for entry to professional education. Gibbs (1994), in a study of BSW admissions, found that even when other sources of information such as interviews, personal essays, or references were required, they tended to be "merely admissions accoutrements which inappropriately circumvented the issue of identifying appropriate standards (i.e., desired professional qualities)" (p. 70). Miller and Koerin's (1998) study found similar results for MSW programs. Eighty-five percent of their respondents had written statements of admission criteria that included nonacademic factors, but only 24% described them as actual criteria (e.g., desired applicant experiences, values, or behaviors) rather than simply as additional screening mechanisms (e.g., references, interviews). These studies suggest the actual operationalization of nonacademic criteria for admission to social work education has been a difficult task.

This challenge is paralleled by the apparent difficulty in developing and implementing policies to terminate students for nonacademic reasons. Koerin and Miller (1995) reported that 67% of MSW programs had no such written policies. While Gibbs (1992) found that a majority of BSW programs did have such policies, almost half of them were still unable to define students' "unsuitability for the profession" (p. 9). This inability to arrive at a definition of unsuitability is interesting given the level of agreement on the types of nonacademic situations or behaviors identified in both studies as warranting termination: nonconformity to professional values and ethics and serious emotional or mental health problems. MSW program respondents specifically identified problematic field performance as the third most frequently cited concern. Field work was also mentioned as the setting in which ethical violations and mental health problems were most likely to be observed (Koerin & Miller, 1995). While the behaviors identified by the BSW respondents were not specific to field, Gibbs noted that "support from field instructors was the factor most likely to make termination for non-academic reasons possible. This suggests that when a student 'slips through the gates' of the academic program, program faculty can count on field instructors to address issues of unsuitability as demonstrated by the student during hands-on experience in the field" (p. 15).

Gatekeeping: The Field Practicum

Another locus of gatekeeping, identified primarily in the BSW literature, is entry into the field practicum. Gibbs (1994), in her study of BSW screening mechanisms, found that 95% of the 207 programs screened students for entry to the practicum. Once again, these criteria were generally academic (e.g., grade point average, prerequisite courses). An exception can be found in Moore and Urwin's (1991) model for screening BSW students for entry into the field practicum that went beyond academic performance. They engaged the student in a structured admission process that included evaluation conferences with faculty to assess "academic performance, self-awareness, and a value system consonant with the profession" (p. 11). No such models have been published about MSW program practices in screening students before entry to the field practicum. Although there are a number of MSW programs that delay entry to foundation field in the first semester, or even wait until the second semester, most MSW curriculum designs require full-time students to begin field concurrently with the rest of the courses, leaving no time for meaningful field-entry assessment processes. MSW part-time programs have flourished, however, which makes such pre-screening theoretically possible in more programs.

Despite gatekeeping processes prior to admission to a social work program and/or prior to entry to the field practicum, a student's unsuitability for the profession may not be recognized until he/she is in a field placement (Coleman, Collins, & Aikins, 1995). At that point, field instructors assume an important gatekeeping role for which they may not be adequately prepared. In an exploratory study of 188 field instructors affiliated with 12 CSWE-accredited programs, Hipple and Harrington (1995) found only 38% of field instructor respondents reported that anyone from the social work program had discussed gatekeeping with them. In addition, these respondents noted the issue of gatekeeping had not even been raised "until after problems with students became evident in the course of the field placement" (p. 5).

Obviously, problematic field performance is not a new concern and neither are the attempts to define and address it. For example, in 1981, Susanna Wilson identified two broad types of field performance problems. In the first, a "student performs an action . . . so outrageous or damaging to others that . . . immediate removal from placement is necessary to protect the agency, the community, the student, and/or clients" (p. 198). Wilson gave the following examples: injuring someone in the agency; psychotic behavior; illegal or immoral behavior, like stealing; extremely inappropriate behavior, such as reporting to the field agency under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or engaging in a sexual relationship with a client (p. 198). In the second type of field prob-

lem, somewhat more common although relatively infrequent, is a subtly emerging pattern of behavior consisting of a recurrent series of lesser problems the student does not seem able to overcome. In this category Wilson placed such behaviors/characteristics as resistance or hostility toward learning, emotional immaturity, "a personality unsuited to social work" (p. 199) due to poor interpersonal skills or judgmental approaches to clients, and emotional problems that interfere with ability to work with clients.

Bogo and Vayda's (1987) description of problematic field behaviors included student difficulty in applying social work theory to practice; inability to develop "purposeful collaborative relationships" (p. 79); having judgmental and critical attitudes toward clients; over-personalizing their professional activity; and, having difficulty dealing with conflict. A final grouping of behaviors was labeled "problems in the use of field instruction" (p. 81) and included the inability to develop self-awareness, using field instruction for personal therapy, and having a tendency to personalize feedback. Rosenblum and Raphael (1987) identified similar behaviors, such as difficulty managing concrete tasks, problems relating to staff and peers, persistent high anxiety, difficulty recognizing and maintaining boundaries, passivity in the learner role, and poor use of field instruction (p. 61). Coleman, Collins, and Aikins (1995) noted that, while there are many descriptions in the literature of problematic or failing field performance, "operational definitions are nonexistent" (p. 260). They saw a need for a research-based list of "red flag" (p. 260) behaviors that could be the basis for such an operational definition. At the same time they warned against the tendency to use such a list and/or definition to prematurely evaluate and label students without allowing sufficient time for growth and learning. Certainly, the determination of what "sufficient time" means, would then be the next challenging research question. This could be an especially useful undertaking given the observation that student problems in the field "all too often appear to surface and escalate with little warning" (Rosenblum & Raphael, 1987, p. 54). Even acknowledging this observation, there is still general agreement that early assessment and continuing feedback to students about their performance in the field can prevent most of these seemingly last minute failures and eliminate the sense of crisis that seems to develop (Hanna, 1992).

Field Evaluation and Gatekeeping

Pease (1988) characterizes evaluation of the student in the field practicum as a "worrisome" and often difficult task for field instructors. The evaluative process in field is an educational feedback mechanism based on the assumption of a developmental learning process in the student as well as the ultimate

mechanism by which we judge whether a student is meeting the knowledge, value and skill standards of the profession.

Knight's 1996 study of students' perception of their field instructors included two field instructor behavior items specifically related to the evaluation of student performance: encouraging open discussion about students' "mistakes and failures as well as . . . successes" (p. 403), and encouraging "self-criticism" (p. 403) that involved exploring the students' own strengths and weaknesses. Not only did the majority of students say their field instructors did both of these things 'frequently' or 'very frequently,' but these two field instructor behaviors correlated highly with the students' perception of field instructor "helpfulness" and their "satisfaction with the relationship" (pp. 408-409). This finding reaffirms results from an earlier national study (Kadushin, 1974) that discovered a major source of supervisees' dissatisfaction was having supervisors who did not give on-going critical feedback to assist them in knowing their strengths and working on their weaknesses. The importance of knowing where one's weaknesses are and what one's strengths are can not be overstated in professional development. Back in 1982, Brennen contended that "the most pervasive learning problem encountered by social work students in the field is that they do not know what is to be learned" (p. 80). Without on-going evaluative dialogue and feedback, knowing what is to be learned may indeed continue to be the most commonly experienced learning problem in the field practicum.

Despite the documented importance of on-going feedback for effective learning, a number of factors have been identified as affecting field instructors' willingness and/or ability to undertake this task, especially when it could lead to a negative evaluation of student performance. For example, some field instructors "fear" that the school and/or agency will not support their assessment, while others may be insecure about the adequacy of the supervision/field instruction they have provided. Some are uncertain about whether their performance expectations are too high or are inconsistent with the standards set by the school, and others may be concerned about their ability to document and defend the evaluation if it is challenged (Wilson, 1981, pp. 195-197). Some field instructors, having had "equivocal experiences" in their own field practica or in subsequent supervision, may over-identify with students and attempt to rescue or protect them (Bogo & Vayda, 1987, p. 77), thus backing down from providing critical feedback. Framing it somewhat differently, Brennen (1982) identified a "field culture," in which field instructors are more aligned with the non-judgmental, humanistic-egalitarian ethos of social work practice than with an educator's role, as another factor contributing to evaluation resistance. Linked to this may be field instructors' concern about student reactions to negative evaluative feedback. Rosenblum and Raphael (1987)

seemed to be referring to this when they noted field instructor's ". . . fear of harming the hard won student-field instructor alliance, the desire to be sensitive to students' maturational needs, the hesitancy to make a professional judgment for fear of being judgmental . . ." (p. 59).

Other helping professions experience similar challenges in their evaluation of student performance. For example, Samec (1995) observed that failing a psychotherapy candidate "is one of the most difficult decisions a psychotherapy supervisor is required to make" (p. 2), and he expressed wonder at how little there was in the literature on the topic. As a step toward rectifying this, he interviewed supervisors who had failed a clinical student during the previous five years in psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy programs in Sweden, the United States and Great Britain. The reasons for failure mirrored some behaviors noted in the social work literature as problematic in the field: continuing anxiety despite support and "narcissistic" disturbances in personality structure. Interestingly, the inability to accept supervision was, for the majority of supervisors in this study (N = 13), "the single most important factor in determining suitability"(p. 8). Also of interest in Samec's study was the extensive discussion of students' reactions to learning of their supervisors' serious concerns. Even though they had already received the concerns in writing, students denied their shortcomings had ever been discussed or brought to their attention. Samec proposed that shame and guilt, often followed by denial, are common reactions in situations that represent such a personal crisis for an individual: " . . . denial and projection are the two defense mechanisms most used during the shock phase" (p. 11). A similar pattern of anger and denial was noted by Wilson (1981) in her discussion of social work students' reactions to negative evaluations. Introducing another reaction, however, she also described students who "express genuine relief that someone has finally made the decision" (p. 198) that the social work profession was not a good match for them. Regardless of students' potential reactions, Wilson suggested that field instructors ask themselves three questions when they are struggling to decide if a student has earned an unsatisfactory evaluation:

1. Would I hire this person?
2. Would I be willing to supervise this person as my employee?
3. Would I want to be served by this person if I were the client?

Contextual Issues Affecting Gatekeeping in Field

In addition to the many interpersonal dynamics that affect the student and field instructor relationship, broader contextual factors also influence evaluation and gatekeeping by field instructors. For example, Brennen (1982) cited two specific organizational factors that could complicate effective evaluation:

1. the field agency may not provide the full range of experiences needed by the student to meet her/his learning objectives;
2. the agency may not allow adequate time for staff to provide field instruction that could be the basis for an effective and meaningful evaluation.

Since Brennan made his observations, changes in the practice environment have further exacerbated these agency pressures and constraints. Managed care, cost containment measures, program downsizing and restructuring have all generated constraints resulting in decreased availability of placements and field instructor time and energy. Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, and Strom (1997), in analyzing the impact of these very contextual factors, also noted that "downsized agencies . . . tend to reduce supervisory staff and rely on less experienced staff for student supervision" (p. 32). These and other contextual shifts must be kept in the forefront as social work programs work with field instructors in relation to their instructional and gatekeeping functions.

The academic environment itself is another "contextual factor" to be considered. As an example, Hanna (1992) noted a "deprofessionalization of many schools of social work" (p. 156), resulting in a more traditionally "academic discipline" model of education in social work today than one more suited to education for a profession. Hanna's conclusion comes partly from his analysis of the declining importance of the field advisor/field liaison role in schools of social work and its shift from one requiring advanced practice and clinical consultation skills to one that is more administrative. Rosenblum and Raphael (1987) may have been noting the same shift when they observed a change in focus in field liaisoning: i.e., an increased emphasis on outcome measures and holding students accountable to behaviorally specific performance standards concurrently with a decreased emphasis on students' personal qualities such as maturity, emotional readiness, and their beliefs and values. In Hanna's (1992) view, a field advisor/field liaison ought to have the skills to "make some assessment of potential 'problems about learning' " (p. 160), form hypotheses about these problems, and teach from specific examples from the students' practice materials. He describes a number of elements which the field advisor can be attuned to, including those where "[S]upervisory mismanagement can play a significant role in activating the student's clinical learning problems . . ." (p. 161). This is a clear reminder that the gatekeeping function of the field instructor must be understood and defined within the total context of the field instructor-student-liaison-school relationship. Within that context it is important to remain alert to the reality that not all "problems in learning" in the practicum rest solely with the student.

The burgeoning number of articles dealing with legal and liability aspects of the field practicum endeavor reflects another contextual factor linked to

gatekeeping. Of particular concern has been the sharing of information about students' personal qualities and the legal ramifications of doing or not doing so. Alperin (1989) conducted a study of how BSW field directors managed personal information about students during the placement process in relation to the Federal Privacy Act of 1974. Most programs, having no policy, dealt with each situation separately, trying to "balance the rights of the students, the liabilities of the agencies and the responsibilities to the clients" (p. 106). Reeser, Wertkin, and Phillips (1992) reported on a study of student and field liaison attitudes about sharing information on students that might be personal and sensitive but possibly relevant to their performance and success in the field practicum. Confidentiality became a central ethical issue here, and students and field liaisons did view it differently. Students were more concerned to maintain their right to give permission for such information to be shared, while field liaisons saw field instructors as "colleagues who have the right to the same student information" (p. 35) to which they have access. Both groups recognized the central importance of attending to the welfare of clients, but there are no clear guidelines for how to balance these competing interests.

Zakutansky and Sirles (1993) were clearer in their expectations: students ought to know that field instructors are part of the educational endeavor and have a right to information that would assist in determining their "readiness for particular social work tasks" (p. 343) in the agency and with their client population. In line with this, Strom-Gottfried (2000) proposed that "when information is exchanged . . . the communication should be for clear, relevant purposes, and should be done with the student's informed consent . . . [with] awareness of the conditions under which the information was shared" (p. 243).

The placement of students with disabilities provides additional challenges regarding the sharing of relevant information. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it clear that this personal information belongs to the student and not the school or field personnel. In a study by Reeser (1992), both field directors and students with disabilities "agreed that students with disabilities are expected to meet the same educational standards and requirements . . ." (p. 100). This agreement, however, does not obviate the need to be aware that balancing these adjustments and maintaining professional standards can be a difficult task. The sharing of relevant information about students in such cases must be managed with openness and creativity while adhering to the requirements of the ADA. Do we share information when the disability is visible? When it is not visible? Do we place the responsibility and right to do so with the student? What is the contract and collegial responsibility between the school/program and the agency/field instructor if we call this a joint endeavor? What role does/should the client(s) have in this process of developing appropriate accommodations?

Ultimately, the legal principle of respondeat superior that informs the vicarious liability of supervisors provides a direct rationale for the sharing of relevant information regarding students' abilities. As field instructors and agencies become aware of the "depth of the responsibility they are accepting when agreeing to supervise students in the field practicum" (Zakutansky & Sirles, 1993, p. 340), they also become aware of the potential risks. They may be agreeing to supervise a student who brings special but hidden challenges to the learning endeavor that, if known, could be monitored more closely. As the person who "signs-off" on a student's work in most agencies, the field instructor is warranting and accepting responsibility for the appropriateness of the work done by that student.

In summary, the social work education community has responded slowly but steadily in developing nonacademic standards for gatekeeping. A review of the literature indicates there is agreement about those student behaviors and situations that raise gatekeeping concerns. Some of these are ethics violations, personal behavior problems, inability to use supervision, inability to develop self-awareness, and difficulty recognizing and maintaining personal and professional boundaries (Moore, Dietz, & Jenkins, 1998). The functions of a field instructor as evaluator, mentor and teacher challenge her/him to facilitate student development through on-going critical and useful feedback and to monitor student performance to standards. These functions have the potential for role tension, since each has positive and negative aspects, but the goal is the same: preparing competent social workers for practice. Students want useful critical feedback and field instructors have a responsibility to provide it through their teaching and gatekeeping functions.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE GATEKEEPING FUNCTION

The potential risks and challenges for all stakeholders in this endeavor can be managed best through open communication among all parties that includes access to areas of knowledge and skill specific to the gatekeeping function in the field instruction role. Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of field instructors surveyed by Hipple and Harrington (1995) expressed a need and a desire for formal training in gatekeeping. Gatekeeping is just one function of the field instructor role, and field instructors are just one group contributing to the gatekeeping process in social work education. Therefore, it is not reasonable to accept the often-expressed expectation that "they'll catch it" when the student gets to field, even if that sometimes does happen. However, it is important to respond to the request of field instructors to know more about how to carry out their gatekeeping function. Thus, the following framework has been devel-

oped that addresses macro, mezzo and micro level knowledge and skills related to gatekeeping needed by field instructors to work with students in the practicum (see Table 1). This framework translates field instructors' request to know more about gatekeeping into two basic questions: "What do I need to know?" and "What do I need to know how to do?" The first section deals with "What do I need to know?" at the macro and mezzo levels, and the second section addresses "What do I need to know how to do?" at the micro level in working directly with students.

The macro level of this framework is conceived as the institutional and contextual aspects of field instruction that need to be considered and understood: the university/college and social work program, the agency, and the context of practice, including legal constraints, liability concerns, and changes in the structure and funding of social work practice itself. The overarching concern for accountability in both practice and education must also be factored into an understanding of the macro context. The mezzo level of this framework is defined as the field department and its staff. The field department operates between the university, the school or program, and the agency, where the demands and constraints of the macro level are translated and managed for effective application to the field education process. At the mezzo level, roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders should be made explicit and policies and procedures clarified.

TABLE 1. What do I need to know?

Macro:
    University and/or Program
	Criteria for Admission and Termination
	        (Academic and Non-Academic)
	Gatekeeping Structure
	Policy on Sharing Information
	Policy/Procedures for Risk Management
	    and Liability
	Legal Requirements or Constraints

Agency	Program-Agency Contract(s) Practice Standards Sharing Information and Confidentiality Agency Support for Teaching Role Clients' Rights
Practice Context	Relevant Public Policy (e.g., ADA) Malpractice and Vicarious Liability Requirements of Managed Care Accountability
Mezzo: Field Department	Field Manual Policies for Handling Student Problems Field Philosophy Field Instructor Training

Field instructors and practicum supervisors can evaluate the degree to which they have the information necessary to adequately perform their gatekeeping function by asking themselves a series of questions. These questions may also be useful in guiding social work programs and other helping professions to design appropriate training for field instructors and practicum supervisors who assume a gatekeeping function as part of their educational role. The following questions address both macro and mezzo knowledge areas:

Macro: University and/or Program

1. What are the criteria for admission to the social work program(s) that place students in your agency? In addition to the standard academic requirements, what personal qualities, values, and life experiences are assessed as part of the admission process?
2. Are program admission standards congruent with what you think is necessary for professional practice? Do field agencies have input into developing admission standards? Do you want to have such input?
3. Can the program share information with you about the students they are placing in your agency? What are the limitations placed on sharing information as a result of the university's compliance with laws such as ADA, or with other program policies?
4. Do you know if the social work program has a specific gatekeeping structure in place? If so, what is the role described for field instructors and what support is available to you as you perform that function?
5. Does the social work program have a written policy on termination of students and does it include criteria other than grades? Have you seen this policy? Does it include procedures for addressing and resolving problems in the practicum?
6. Are limitations placed on the social work program by the university or college in relation to admissions or termination of students? University constraints may vary by program level (BSW, MSW) and institutional auspices (public, private nonsectarian, private sectarian).
7. Are expectations clear about liability and risk management? Who carries a policy? Who is covered by the policy? What is covered by the policy?

Macro: Field Practicum Agency

1. Does your agency have a signed contract with the social work program that governs placement of students? If so, have you seen it and what provisions does it make for addressing problematic student behaviors?
2. Does your agency have its own separate contract that the university or program has signed? If so, have you seen it and what provisions does it make for addressing problematic student behavior?
3. What is your agency's expectation regarding holding students to agency practice standards?

4. Are you restricted in sharing information about your experience with a student with the social work program? Does your human service department require confidentiality in matters related to student behavior while at the agency?
5. Does your agency provide adequate support for your role as field instructor? This includes time for supervisory conferences with the student and time to meet the program's requirements for training and/or meetings.
6. How are clients' rights to adequate services managed in the learning-by-doing environment? How do you maintain awareness of the ultimate impact of the learning process on clients and on the delivery of agency services?

Macro: Practice Context

1. How have the social work program and your agency responded to the requirements of ADA? Do you know what "reasonable accommodations" are for practice in your setting? How do students learn about such legal requirements in practice as "duty to warn" and "mandated reporting"?
2. What are the provisions for student malpractice coverage? What are the expectations of funding sources and/or third party payers regarding coverage for students?
3. How much do you and the agency understand about vicarious liability for supervisors? How is this managed in the agency and between the agency and the program?
4. What are the requirements of managed care programs and what potential do they have for limiting or enhancing students' learning opportunities?
5. How are various accountability requirements (e.g, managed care, outcome assessment for funding sources) communicated to students? How are these requirements balanced with students' developmental learning needs?

Mezzo: Field Department

1. Is there a Field Manual? Does it clearly delineate rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the practicum endeavor?
2. Are there specific policies and procedures in the Field Manual for handling difficult student situations that may result in withdrawal from field, remediation of problems and/or termination from the program? Does field instruction training include information on your role in these processes?
3. What is the program's philosophy of field education and/or the practicum? How is this philosophy reflected in your role as field instructor? How is it reflected in the role of the faculty field liaison and/or field advisor?
4. To what extent does field instruction training include specific information about the "red flags" and "pervasive patterns" of student difficulty that have been identified in the literature?

Having answers to the above questions provides the knowledge necessary but not sufficient for effective gatekeeping. Ultimately, this information is applied in the field instructor-student relationship. Teaching, learning and evaluation of student performance occur in the context of this relationship, which is the micro aspect of this gatekeeping framework.

The importance of developing an understanding of professional roles and relationships and conscious use of self are essential elements of student learning for a successful field practicum experience. In a similar vein, field instructors must define their professional role as educators and discuss this with their students at the outset of the practicum. The field instructor-student relationship is both complex and dynamic, consisting of multiple roles, expectations, and changes over time that reflect student learning and development and the related shifts in the supervisory relationship. The following questions provide a basis for self-reflection as field instructors consider the skills needed for being effective in their education and gatekeeping functions.

Micro: Field Instructor-Student Relationship

1. How do you characterize your role with your field student? Are you a social worker, teacher, mentor, role model, colleague, evaluator, gatekeeper? What is at stake for you and for the student in each of these?
2. Do you move between and among these various roles or do you conceptualize them as different parts of one role, that of being a field instructor? Are there inherent contradictions or tensions in these aspects of what you do with practicum students?
3. Are you proactive or reactive in defining your role with the student? Do you consciously take on the role of field instructor or do you let it evolve?
4. Are there similarities and differences in your interactions with employees, colleagues, clients, and with your student(s)? What can you draw from these other relationships (in which you might set standards, provide guidance, focus on strengths, and evaluate performance) that would be helpful in your gatekeeping function?
5. In your role as field instructor, how do you balance the best interests of the student, the client(s), and the profession?
6. Does the social work program provide training that acknowledges, describes and provides techniques for managing potential role conflicts in your work as a field instructor?
7. What are your skills, strengths, and learning needs in the areas of giving critical feedback, conducting on-going evaluation of performance, documenting performance deficits and monitoring remediation plans?

Fox (1998) describes the mutuality in the field instructor-student relationship by noting that "field instruction itself constitutes a helping relationship"

(p. 61). However, he also recognizes that field instruction "... is one of the profession's forms of quality control, which is particularly emphasized in this time of public accountability ... " (p. 63). Abbott and Lyter (1998) agree, and while not discounting the importance of creating a "positive, productive learning environment ... consisting of a positive relationship ... in which there is trust and sincerity" (p. 49), they note that "[H]istorically, supervisory relationships have paralleled non-directive therapeutic approaches, with limited emphasis on assessment and even less on corrective action" (p. 44). Their study reinforced the importance to students of having a field instructor who is capable of and willing to provide on-going critical feedback (see: Abbot & Lyter, 1998; Coleman, Collins & Aikens, 1995; Rosenblum & Raphael, 1987; Wilson, 1981).

Most field instructors are able to move back and forth in their supportive and critical roles easily as situations with their students call for these different skills (see Table 2). However, in the case of a student having difficulty in the practicum, these roles may be experienced as conflicting. In those situations, attending to and understanding the felt role tension will be useful for field instructors as they fulfill seemingly contradictory supervisory functions. For example, most direct practice field instructors identify as social workers first, assuming their role is to facilitate individuals' growth and development. In addition, however, field instructors have contracted with the social work program to assume the role of educator, which includes the tasks of evaluation, constructive criticism, feedback, and gatekeeping. Another potential conflict can be found in the field instructor's responsibility to the agency and ultimately to the clients for the work done by her/his student, balanced with the role she/he has in providing appropriate experiences for the student to "learn by doing."

In resolving role tension and managing multiple functions and self-identities, social workers exercise professional judgment as they do in other areas of their professional life. The decision-making requirements in these situations are not resolved simply by following a prescribed set of rules or procedures. Most of social work practice, like the field instruction process itself, entails attention to the implications of varying and sometimes contradictory roles,

TABLE 2. What do I need to know how to do?

Micro: Field Instructor-Student Relationship	Define Roles Manage Role Tension Assert the Field Instruction Role Balance Interests: Student, Client, Profession Provide Evaluation and Feedback

awareness of the boundaries and requirements of ethical behavior, and thought-ful, differential use of a complex knowledge base. As in other professional re-lationships, one does not suddenly change one's fundamental role, actions, or demeanor partway through the work together because the demands of the situ-ation suddenly change. Rather, one thinks in advance about the nature of the relationship being established, the requirements of that relationship under all potential conditions, and prepares to facilitate whatever unfolds in a profes-sional manner.

Summary

The field instructor role is complex and multifaceted, requiring a knowl-edge and skill base necessary for carrying out the responsibilities of teacher, mentor, evaluator, and gatekeeper. The gatekeeping framework presented here offers field instructors a systematic way of preparing for their role and guid-ance to social work programs in developing field instructor training. The deci-sion to exercise the gatekeeping function, possibly terminate a student from the practicum and ultimately from the social work program, is an unsettling one for all involved. But ultimately, as stated at the beginning of this paper, field instructors have an important role, as partners in the educational process, in warranting that students who graduate from BSW and MSW programs are prepared to be competent and ethical practitioners.

REFERENCES

Abbott, A.A., & Lyter, S.C. (1998). The use of constructive criticism in field supervi-sion. The Clinical Supervisor, 17 (2), 43-57.

Alperin, D.E. (1989). Confidentiality and the BSW field work placement process. Journal of Social Work Education, 25, 98-108.

Bernard, J.M., & Goodyear, R.K. (1998). Fundamentals of clinical supervision (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bogo, M., & Vayda, E. (1987). The practice of field instruction in social work: Theory and process. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Brennen, E.C. (1982). Evaluation of field teaching and learning. In B.W. Sheafor & L.E. Jenkins (Eds.), Quality field instruction in social work: Program development and maintenance, (pp. 76-97). New York: Longman.

Cobb, N.H., & Jordan, C. (1989). Students with questionable values or threatening be-havior: Precedent and policy from discipline to dismissal. Journal of Social Work Education, 25 (2), 87-97.

Cole, B.S., & Lewis, R. G. (1993). Gatekeeping through termination of unsuitable so-cial work students: Legal issues and guidelines. Journal of Social Work Education, 29 (2), 150-159.

Coleman, H., Collins, D., & Aikins, D. (1995). The student-at-risk in the practicum. In G. Rogers (Ed.), Social work field education: Views and visions, (pp. 256-269). Dubuque, IO: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Fox, R. (1998). An essay on mutuality and parallel process in field instruction. The Clinical Supervisor, 17 (2), 59-73.

Gibbs, P. (1992). Gatekeeping in BSW programs. Paper presented at the Council on Social Work Education Annual Program Meeting, Kansas City, MO.

Gibbs, P. (1994). Screening mechanisms in BSW programs. Journal of Social Work Education, 30 (1), 63-74.

Hanna, E.A. (1992). The demise of the field advising role in social work education. The Clinical Supervisor, 10 (2), 149-164.

Hepler, J. B., & Noble, J. H., Jr. (1990). Improving social work education: Taking responsibility at the door. Social Work, 35 (2), 126-133.

Hipple, L., & Harrington, I. (1995). The role of the agency-based field instructor in the gatekeeping process. Paper presented at the Baccalaureate Program Directors Conference, Nashville, TN.

Jarman-Rohde, L., McFall, J., Kolar, P., & Strom, G. (1997). The changing context of social work practice: Implications and recommendations for social work educators. Journal of Social Work Education, 33 (1), 29-46.

Kadushin, A. (1974). Supervisor-supervisee: A survey. Social Work, 19 (May), 288-297.

Knight, C. (1996). A study of MSW and BSW students' perceptions of their field instructors. Journal of Social Work Education, 32 (3), 399-414.

Koerin, B., & Miller, J. (1995). Gatekeeping policies: Terminating students for nonacademic reasons. Journal of Social Work Education, 31 (2), 247-260.

Miller J., & Koerin, B. (1998). Can we assess suitability at admission? A review of MSW application procedures. Journal of Social Work Education, 34 (3), 437-451.

Moore, L.S., Dietz, T.J, & Jenkins, D.A. (1998). Issues in gatekeeping. The Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, 4 (1), 37-50.

Moore, L.S., & Urwin, C.A. (1990). Quality control in social work: The gatekeeping role in social work education. Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 4 (1), 113-128.

Moore, L.S., & Urwin, C.A. (1991). Gatekeeping: A model for screening baccalaureate students for field education. Journal of Social Work Education, 27 (1), 8-17.

Pease, B. (1988). The ABC's of social work student evaluation. Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 2 (2), 35-50.

Peterman, P.L., & Blake, R. (1986). The inappropriate BSW student. Arete, 11 (1), 27-34.

Reeser, C.R. (1992). Students with disabilities in practicum: What is reasonable accommodation? Journal of Social Work Education, 28 (1), 98-109.

Reeser, L.C., Wertkin, R.A., & Phillips, D.J. (1992). Sharing sensitive student information with field instructors: Responses of students and liaisons. Paper presented at Council on Social Work Education, Annual Program Meeting, Kansas City, MO.

Rosenblum, A.F., & Raphael, F.B. (1987). Students at risk in the field practicum and implications for field teaching. The Clinical Supervisor, 5 (3), 53-63.

Samec, J.R. (1995). Shame, guilt, and trauma: Failing the psychotherapy candidate's clinical work. The Clinical Supervisor, 13 (2), 1-17.

Strom-Gottfried, K. (2000). Ethical vulnerability in social work education: An analysis of NASW complaints. Journal of Social Work Education, 36 (2), 241-252.

Watkins, C.E., Jr. (1999). The beginning psychotherapy supervisor: How can we help? The Clinical Supervisor, 18 (2), 63-72.

Wilson, S.J. (1981). Field instruction techniques for supervisors. New York: The Free Press.

Zakutansky, T.J., & Sirles, E. (1993). Ethical issues in field education: Shared responsibility and risk. Journal of Social Work Education, 29 (3), 338-347.