

Humboldt State University
Department of Social Work

SW255: Volunteer Experience

Fall, 2003
Fridays
11:00am-11:50am
Forestry 201

Instructor: Ronnie Swartz
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Office Hours:
Tuesdays 2:00pm-4:00pm

Course Description: Beginning experience volunteering in social service settings to acquire skills in building helping relationships and to develop understanding of social work ethics, values and roles in a diverse society. Focus of seminar meetings is exploration of self in relationship to helping. Two units: four hours/week of volunteer work and one hour/week in seminar. Graded Credit/No Credit.

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Become aware of how personal needs and beliefs influence helping relationships.
2. Be able to distinguish between being a “friend” and a “helper”.
3. Identify core qualities in effective helping relationships.
4. Understand and respect the confidentiality of persons with whom you work.
5. Gain a beginning overview of social services offered in the community.
6. Have the opportunity to develop a relationship with someone from a different background or situation, e.g. different class, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation.
7. Develop a beginning style in helping that focuses on a person's strengths.
8. Have a beginning understanding of the importance of the NASW Code of Ethics to the helping process.
9. Actively listen and participate in weekly seminar discussion in a manner that results in a better understanding of one's own helping style.
10. Demonstrate use of supervision in the acquisition of helping skills and as a member of an agency or organization.
11. Identify and interpret social research and other literature to enhance one's understanding of human conditions and social services encountered in volunteer work.
12. Appreciate how social injustice, discrimination and service inequities impacts upon populations-at-risk.

Reading

Brandon, David. (1976). *Zen in the Art of Helping*. New York: Dell Publishing.

- This is on reserve at the Library.

Responsibilities

Students are expected to complete sixty (60) hours of volunteer work in a selected social service agency.

Assignments

Journal – Keep a reflective journal of your field experience which *includes the dates and times of your volunteer hours*. You will submit this journal to me **every other week**. Most people find that *1-2 single-spaced pages* (or the equivalent in hand written pages) is enough to cover their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Journals tend to be the most meaningful when they are used as a place to think about what your experiences have meant to you, rather than detailing your day to day activities. Some ideas include:

- feelings about the difficult problems people face
- observations of staff and their use of skills
- thoughts about ethical behavior, value conflicts, and ethical dilemmas
- reactions to your role
- questions and thoughts about how your activities relate to the profession of social work
- differences and similarities among people in styles of interviewing or conducting helping sessions
- how your own background influences your role as a helper

This list is not meant to limit you...it is not meant as a list of questions you are to respond to each week. Instead, the above list is to encourage you to think about your experiences in critical, reflective, and meaningful ways. Remember the importance of confidentiality. What you write is to reflect respect for every person's privacy. I, too, will uphold your confidentiality in relation to what you write.

Learning objectives – **By September 26** you will submit a list of 3 things you are interested in getting out of your volunteer experience, how you will get those things out of your experience, and how you will know you have gotten those things out of your experience. You will refer to these learning objectives throughout the course and use these in the final evaluation of your experience. *You will also need to establish a regular volunteer schedule.*

Article review and paper – Locate a *professional journal article* that relates to the work your agency is involved in and that actually interests you. Show it to me for approval. Then write an essay that considers the following questions:

- How do the ideas in the article fit in with what you already know about or have heard about in relation to the topic discussed?
- How do the ideas in the article seem helpful with the kind of work that is being done at your agency/program?
- How might the ideas limit the kind of work that is being done at your agency?
- How might you introduce some of the most helpful ideas to people you work with?
- Are there ways in which the ideas presented in the article relate to what you have read in *Zen in the Art of Helping*?

You'll find that about 2-3 *single-spaced pages* should give you enough space to effectively communicate your ideas. **Due October 24.**

End of semester reflective letter – Read through all the weekly journals you've written so far and take a reflective position on your volunteer experience *in the form of a letter to someone you worked with.*

- How did things measure up to your expectations?
- How do you see your experiences fitting into other areas of your life?
- Which of your qualities were most utilized in your setting?
- Which of your qualities were not utilized?
- In the future, how might you more fully use your strengths to enhance the work you are doing?
- What sorts of dilemmas did you encounter?
- What kinds of ethical questions did you find yourself faced with?
- How did you navigate your way through the many decisions you had to make?
- How do you see your work fitting into the work of the agency?
- How do you see your work fitting into this community?
- How do you see your work as social work?

About 2 *single-spaced pages* should work well for you. Make two copies of this letter in case you want to give a copy of this letter to someone you worked with. **Due December 12.**

Final evaluation – You and your agency supervisor will complete an evaluative questionnaire at the end of the semester or at the conclusion of sixty (60) hours of service. It will include an assessment of previously identified learning objectives. This is to be turned in by **December 17.**

Engagement – Come to class every week and use the class as a place to wonder aloud, ask for suggestions, share your achievements, voice your struggles, and explore your development as a social worker. *You will not receive credit for the class if you miss more than 3 classes.*

Receiving Credit

I am interested in co-creating a course with you that allows us to explore learning without being limited by social constructions around grades. If you'd prefer that I evaluate your assignments and assign "credit/no credit", I will. However, I invite you to evaluate yourself in this regard. Along with the article review paper and the final reflective paper, you may turn in an available "Grade Self-Assessment" document that I will distribute within which you can reflect on your experience of the assignment and your assessment of "credit/no credit".

- I will let you know whether I agree with you or if I have a different perspective. I might ask you to explore some areas further, revise your assessment, or come have a conversation with me.

I prefer to have all written assignments be *single-spaced*, standard 12 point Times New Roman font, standard margins (1" top and bottom, 1¼" left and right), and double-sided. This format saves paper and is easy for me to read. If you can do this, great. If not, so be it, but *account for this* when you write your paper. Please concern yourself more with content than length...a little bit shorter or a little bit longer is just fine if that's what it takes to convey your thoughts. Written assignments can be emailed to me at rjs19@humboldt.edu if you'd like.

Some Thoughts About the Volunteer Experience:

- Follow the policies, procedures and dress code outlined in the agency/program manual. Try to read through this material early in your experience. Ask if you have questions or are unclear on some policy. Talk with staff if you have any ethical dilemmas regarding any policies or procedures.
- Spend time with staff to clarify your legal and ethical responsibilities, especially in the areas of mandatory reporting, confidentiality and liability (e.g. transporting clients).
- Find out any differences between being a student and a paid staff as it is defined in your particular agency.
- Trust yourself. If something doesn't feel right, ask for assistance from someone you trust. Talk with your supervisor and other staff about any concerns or insecurities. Remember that this is *your* learning experience. We can learn from situations that didn't go as we had planned when we use supervision to better understand our role, the client's/consumer's situation, environmental influences, and so on.
- Your volunteer placement needs to be taken as seriously as a paid employee. Clients and staff will come to count on you and you will need to be responsible, reliable, and mature in your relationship with them. This is an academic course to be taken with as much commitment as any course, plus a commitment to those people whom you are engaged in tasks, activities, and change efforts.

Class Dates

(all dates are Fridays except where noted)

<p>August 25 [Monday]</p> <p>introduction to course, instructor, other students, and placement possibilities</p>	<p>August 27 [Wednesday]</p> <p>more of the same</p>	<p>August 29</p> <p>firm up volunteer placement options</p> <p>**read course syllabus**</p>	<p>September 5</p> <p>confidentiality</p>	<p>September 12</p> <p>metaphors of helping</p> <p>**read up to page 47 of <i>Zen in the Art of Helping</i>**</p> <p>**journal due**</p>
<p>September 19</p> <p>working with people</p>	<p>September 26</p> <p>process and outcomes</p> <p>**read up to page 79 of <i>Zen in the Art of Helping</i>**</p> <p>**learning objectives due**</p> <p>**journal due**</p>	<p>October 3</p> <p>self care</p>	<p>October 10</p> <p>change</p> <p>**finish reading <i>Zen in the Art of Helping</i>**</p> <p>**journal due**</p>	<p>October 17</p> <p>boundaries and values</p>
<p>October 24</p> <p>negotiating “The System”</p> <p>**article review and paper due**</p> <p>**journal due**</p>	<p>October 31</p>	<p>November 7</p> <p>**journal due**</p>	<p>November 14</p> <p>closure, transitions, and moving on</p>	<p>November 21</p> <p>**journal due**</p>
<p>November 28</p> <p>NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)</p>	<p>December 5</p>	<p>December 12</p> <p>evaluate class</p> <p>**journal due**</p> <p>**end of the semester reflective letter due**</p>	<p>[December 17 – NO CLASS]</p> <p>**final evaluation due**</p>	

