# Instructing Social Work Field Instructors on the Web: Lessons Learned

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# Instructing Social Work Field Instructions on the Web: Lessons Learned

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### Introduction

The existence of the World Wide Web presents both opportunities and challenges for the delivery of higher education curricula, with schools of social work in Canada having put the greatest focus on credit courses. This paper presents the development and experience with distance delivery of a non-credit professional education course on field instruction for social workers affiliated with the School of Social Work at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). The initiative was sparked by the School's affirmation of the value of rural social work placements as integral to the Bachelor of Social Work program and the associated need to offer a comprehensive and accessible course for new and prospective field instructors located in areas near and far from the university. It was designed to be relevant for individuals in close geographic proximity to the School, as well as for field instructors in rural and remote parts of the province and also to be adaptable for use in schools of social work outside the province.

This article shares lessons learned by the members of the course design project team within the context of the institution and the professional community in the key areas of development of the course design; the politics and planning about course delivery; and modifications needed in response to course evaluation by participants and the design team.

### Building the Course within the University

To initiate the development of the course, the Director of the School of Social Work established a project team composed of two faculty members, both of whom had extensive field education experience complemented by individual strengths in field curriculum and online course development. The third member of the team, the BSW Field Coordinator, provided the essential interconnection among past field instruction courses offered by the School, familiarity with current and potential field instructors and their learning needs, and field education practices. It became readily apparent that designing web-based delivery of a course on field instruction would require additional institutional and external partnerships. Institutional partners included Distance Education and Life Long Learning program and instructional designers in the university's department of Distance Education and Learning Technologies (DELT). Key external partners included social workers, new and prospective field instructors as potential registrants in the course, the province-wide Social Work Field Instructors' Association (FIA), and experienced field instructors.

A preliminary needs assessment was conducted via the newsletter of the provincial social workers' association (NLASW) to explore feasibility of using the web to deliver a field instruction course. Responses gave support to proceeding with its development and also provided a self-identified cohort of registrants for the pilot offering. The team then entered the work of formatting the curriculum material for web delivery in order to be ready for the first course trial the following semester. Also during this initial phase, student assistance was utilized to update the already existing bibliography on field education and dis-

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tance delivery of field education.

Each member of the team was responsible for specific aspects of the design. The Field Coordinator reviewed the needs assessment data related to the applicability of web delivery of a field instruction course. One faculty member focussed on revising and expanding a previously constructed curriculum, and the third member of the team translated the "in person" design to a WebCT course format. The work was accomplished in collaboration with additional key university players: 1) the Division of Lifelong Learning, which houses, sells and markets courses to potential students and has the "upfront" money to launch such part-time non-credit courses; and 2) Distance Education and Learning Technologies (DELT), which has the technical expertise for web-based course delivery. These partners were critical to the realization of the project as their range of experience, expertise, and resources were essential to augment those available within the School of Social Work.

The project team worked throughout the design path with three assumptions: first, that the field instruction course would bring a great deal of new content to the many course participants with limited experience in field instruction; second, that field instructors may have experience supervising students in the field but with no prior formal field instruction training; and third, that the web-based distance modality would be less familiar to course participants than the traditional face to face method of course delivery.

**Format of the Course**

This field education course is designed to prepare individuals to become eligible as field instructors with the School of Social Work at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). It provides prospective field instructors with the theoretical and practice aspects of social work field education, and is intended to challenge participants to think critically about field instruction, adult education concepts, field education meth-

ods, some particular field education issues, and terminating and evaluating the field education experience. It builds on a field education curriculum developed previously by Sullivan and Kenyon (1998) and integrates the BSW field education workshop materials (Murray, 2001).

Throughout the course and this paper, the term "participant" refers to the field instructors taking this course; and "student" refers to BSW or MSW program students who are placed with a field instructor in a practice setting. The "course instructor" is the Field Coordinator person designated in the School of Social Work to teach/facilitate the web-based field instructors' course. The term "non-credit" refers to courses which are designated for professional development and do not carry academic credit.

The original course was designed as 5 modules organized for delivery in two parts, covering a period of two concurrent academic semesters: spring for Part I, and the fall term for Part II. Once registered, participants receive materials to orient them to using Web CT as the instructional medium, and a print manual. Part I of the course consists of 2 modules and is done pre placement, that is, before a BSW or MSW program student is placed in the field setting. It provides participants with the opportunity to explore the theory and principles of social work field education which are crucial to contributing to a successful field instruction experience with placement students, and also provides preparatory information to orient oneself and the setting to the impending student placement. Although Part I is largely a "Self Study" in which participants process the learning on their own and in communication primarily with the course instructor, it is taken with a cohort of others, an objective of which is to establish and foster, by means of a web-based discussion forum, a network of peers for mutual support and learning throughout the two parts of the course and possibly beyond. At the time, they may have made a commitment to a particular student, or are preparing for field instruction at some future time.

The two modules of Part I are "The Placement Begins…. What Am I In For?", and "The Process of Field Learning". Within each module there are three units which address related topics for a total of 13 weeks. The Units in Module 1 are 'Orientation and integration of the student'; 'Framework of the relationship between the student, field instructor, and the School of Social Work'; and 'Beginning the work of the placement'. In Module 2, the Units are 'Elements of the learning experience'; 'Developing the placement relationship between the student and the field instructor'; and 'Defining and developing competence in social work'.

Based upon this strong foundation, Part II, "Theory to Practice", continues as a 13-week interactive, collaborative, parallel learning experience for participants, based on adult learning concepts, and building on the support base established among peer participants and the course instructor in Part I. Although it is ideal for participants to have a student placed with them at the time, they may proceed to Part II regardless, as preparation for future placements. This part of the course is presented as a "co-curriculum" in 3 modules, that is, ideally to be completed concurrently with the field instruction process once a student begins the field placement. It encourages and facilitates parallel learning of the participating field instructors and the field instruction course instructor, and that of the field instructor and student pairs.

The modules of Part II are "Field Education Methods", "Challenging Field Education Issues", and "The Placement Ends… Over So Soon?" At this point in the field education process, students and their field instructors are together in their respective settings. The course here addresses instrumental and practical matters inherent for both, facilitating a parallel learning experience. In Module 3, the Units are 'Using supervision time'; 'Blocks to learning'; and 'Integration of learning'. Module 4 moves into values-related issues that typically would be present or emerge in an

expected, naturally evolving manner in every field placement. They are covered in Units 1 and 2: 'Affirming values: an anti-oppression stance'; and 'Ethical dilemmas'. Unit 3 deals with 'Particular issues' that may arise as "problems" with a specific student. Examples of this are students with limited life or work experience, students who have a lot of life or work experience and seem closed to new learning, students who are anxious, and students who are overwhelmed by the placement, perhaps due to personal circumstances. The fifth and final Module assists participants with tasks and responsibilities associated with ending the placement. The units are: 'Process of termination'; 'Process of evaluation'; and 'Review: Setting & school relationship'.

Units are formatted uniformly across the Modules, beginning with a list of required and suggested readings. Citations for readings available in online journals are indicated. The other required readings would have been sent to participants with the course package prior to commencement of the course. Following the readings list in each Unit are the Online Notes composed by the course designers from the literature and their experience in the delivery of field education from their own multiple perspectives as faculty members, field liaisons, field instructors, and long ago students themselves. Additional course material is offered in the form of seven video vignettes distributed through the Modules. In the interests of "humanizing" and augmenting the didactic material, as well as infusing the course with some humor, videos were made for the course and address such topics as "Attitude and Aptitude", "Dilemma for the Student", and "Supervision vs. Therapy" which presents the "anti-model" of field supervision in which the field instructor inappropriately takes on a therapist role with a student expressing personal problems.

**Objectives of the Course for Participants**

In terms of objectives, it is expected that participants having completed the course should be

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prepared to provide field instruction, and specifically to:

- demonstrate understanding of preparatory aspects of commencing field instruction;
- demonstrate understanding of the conceptual and practical aspects of how field learning occurs as a significant component of social work education;
- demonstrate applications of field instruction methods;
- apply theories related to teaching and learning to field instruction;
- address challenging issues in field education;
- implement strategies of monitoring student progress; and
- demonstrate an understanding of student evaluation methods.

**Evaluation of Participation in the Course**

Evaluation of participation occurs in the context of two types of exercises appearing at the end of the units. As this is a noncredit course, but recognized as continuing education credit by NLASW, a certificate rather than a grade is given by the School of Social Work for course completion. "Self Assessment Exercises" are designed for personal learning and self-reflection, and invite participants to share selected activities with the course instructor and peers in the web discussion forum. As an example, the self-assessment exercise in Module 1, Unit 1 helps participants to prepare their agency for the student placement. It reads: "Thinking about your setting, and orientation and integration of the student to be placed with you, what preparation has been done or will be needed for the student's arrival in terms of: a) attitudes and expectations within the setting, b) materials and means for her/him to learn about the agency, and c) safety considerations?" The Online Notes and readings serve as resources to assist in the work of the exercises.

"Online Exercises" also take place in the online discussion forum. Participants are given opportunities to complete them both individually and in groups. These exercises are designed to stimulate thought and discussion on a variety of field instruction issues and ideas. The discussion forum is monitored and directed by the course instructor, and participants are encouraged to join in regularly. An example of an Online Exercise is dealing with evaluation of field students. Participants are asked to: "Share in the discussion forum your planned process of evaluation with a view to: a) "taking stock" of achievements and consolidation of learning, b) gains or development of competencies during the placement, c) gains beyond the learning plan, d) reframing and naming what is learned but not yet recognized by the student, e) the achieved point of development of the student's professional identity, and f) future directions for learning." As with the Self Assessment Exercises, the Online Notes and readings would be used as resources for completing this exercise.

The final exercise in Module 2, marking the end of Part I of the course, is a brief paper to be emailed to the course instructor outlining how the prospective field instructor/course participant plans to assist the student placed with him/her to develop competency in social work in terms of a) the three inter-related spheres of core skills, self-awareness, and professional identity; b) the student's beginning reflective practice; and c) use of the learning plan for ongoing evaluation."

Course Evaluation Results

At the conclusion of the course to date, participants were invited to evaluate the course using a questionnaire made available to them online, and designed to be completed and returned to the School anonymously. The data gathered and discussed in this paper include those from the questionnaires completed by the participant cohorts. Some additional data were obtained from the online discussion forum in the course, from follow-up by the BSW Field Coordinator with participants, and from phone interviews with the first cohort of course participants conducted by a student research assistant. Additionally, some data

were gleaned from the written assignment on reflective practice and the learning plan completed by course participants in the second offering of the course. Finally, invaluable insights and reflections emerged from the course instructor and faculty course designers through our shared work together on the project.

**Pilot 1 – Winter – Spring 2003**

In response to the point at which the course was ready for delivery and current demand for field instruction training, the course was offered in a different time frame than proposed by the design team. The first pilot of the course was offered over two semesters (winter and spring) in 2003, a total of thirty weeks from January to August. Thirteen social workers registered for the course, of which only one completed it and received a certificate. Eight did not participate beyond their initial registration. Five individuals were online until partway into the course (some as far as three-quarters completed) and then dropped out.

Five participants indicated high satisfaction generally with the accessibility and convenience of the web modality for course delivery. In particular, they liked the link with one another made possible using the Internet. Two of the five participants indicated that they did not complete the course because it was too demanding in terms of its length, the volume of work required on top of the responsibilities related to their employment, and unfamiliarity with WebCT courses.

Reasons given by some who registered but did not participate in the course included illness, pregnancy, "intimidation" by the web format, and new work commitments. One respondent, who was not "comfortable" with online participation, indicated that s/he had read all the material and viewed the videos, and found them interesting and useful. In sum, personal circumstances, time constraints related to the demands of their paid job, and lack of familiarity with a web format were the key factors identified by non-

participants and dropouts. The dropout rate presented a greatly diminished opportunity to assess the course content. The fact that this pilot did not run concurrently with a student placement also compromised the benefits intended in the course design of a parallel learning process for field instructor and placement student.

**Pilot 2 Spring – Fall 2004**

The second pilot of the course was offered in the time frame originally proposed for the original course design in the Spring and Fall Semesters (two 13 week semesters) from April to December, 2004. Twenty people registered for the course. Twelve of the 20 people were from urban areas and the remaining eight were from rural regions of the province. Three-quarters of the participants were female. They worked in rural and urban health and community services, youth and seniors' agencies. Nine (almost one-half) completed it and received a certificate, of whom eight had a BSW and one an MSW, and eight were females and one was male.

Of the 11 who did not finish, 4 partially finished, and 7 did not participate at all after registering. Reasons given by those who registered but did not participate online included being on leave from their employment, heavy workload, and having changed jobs recently. Of the 4 who partially completed the course, reasons for discontinuing were heavy employment workload, lost momentum after a long vacation, and recent job change. Overall these participants were enthusiastic about the course. One said, "The web-based format was quite advantageous for me, for if not for this format, I likely would not have been able to access it. After learning to navigate through the format, I found it quite easy to participate in it." Similarly a second participant reported, "The web-based format of this course worked well when our computers worked well."

**Pilot 3 – Spring – Fall 2005**

The third offering of the course also was deliv-

ered in the time frame proposed in the original course design with one exception. The Part I Field Instruction Self Study online 13 week component was replaced with a three hour teleconference. This mode provided Field I Instructors within commuting distance of the campus with a face to face meeting during the teleconference and a telephone link for those in rural areas. Twenty-eight people registered for the course, 7 males and 21 females, of whom 2 people dropped the course. Over 60% of the participants were from rural areas of the province. They represented a range of social work areas in both the government and not for profit sectors (i.e., heath, long term care, corrections, and addictions).

**Results Summary: Benefits and Limitations of Course**

Evaluation of the first three offerings of the course has illuminated numerous benefits, as well as some limitations, for the participants and the course instructor. Table 1 reveals the benefits and

gaps for the participants and the course instructor.

**Benefits for Participants**

Accessibility. The course provided some benefits to participants, one of which was accessibility. Internet delivery meant that it could be taken by participants from all regions of the province. This was particularly beneficial for those in the more remote, rural areas who wanted a professional development course on field instruction, but could not afford the time and costs incurred in attending a classroom version. By the third offering, over 60% of course participants were from such rural regions, suggesting that accessibility may be an important influencing factor affecting course enrollment.

Flexibility. Participants indicated that the web-based format allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling time to complete the readings and join in discussion forums. For the majority of participants, time free for the course was found generally outside of normal working hours. The flexi-

**Table 1. Web Course Evaluation: Benefits and Limitations for Participants and Course Instructor**

| Benefits | Limitations |
|---|---|
| For Participants | For Participants |
| • Accessibility for field instructors in urban, rural, and remote areas | • Knowledge & experience with WebCT course delivery |
| • Flexibility for busy work schedules | • Access to home or office computers and internet |
| • Self-directed learning approach | • Length of course offering |
| • Potential to generate mutual support among participants | |
| For the Course Instructor | For the Course Instructor |
| • Flexibility and manageability for a busy work schedule | • Limited preparation and familiarity with WebCT course delivery |
| • Means for accessing and recruiting new field instructors in urban, rural, and remote regions provincially and nationally | • Time spent encouraging participants to take part in discussion forums |
| | • Significant time commitment |
| | • Continuing need to offer in class traditional mode of field instruction education |
| | • Exploration of new technologies to support increased face to face learning opportunities. |

bility meant also that participants were able to reduce their involvement in the course temporarily when circumstances such as heavy employment demands took precedence.

Self-direction. The course offers a self-directed approach to learning that is complementary with the adult learning model. At their convenience, participants were expected to read online notes, view videos, and conduct exercises biweekly as well as post comments in the web discussion forum on the topic scheduled for the given two-week period. The extent of their involvement in the coursework by and large was decided by the individual participants. The only evidence of their involvement was their contribution to the biweekly discussion forums and, in the case of the third offering, their contributions to the teleconference.

Mutual support. Mutual support clearly was generated among participants. Several commented that they had looked forward to interacting with their colleagues in the discussion forum. When asked, "What was most useful about this course for you?" one person responded," I found the discussion most useful. I have come to realize I am an interactive learner and like to discuss things with others." In their final online comments, many participants wished each other well and hoped that they would "meet again" sometime soon! Several suggested that the group could have monthly phone conferences to enable more spontaneous interaction. Use of the term "group" by participants is, in itself, an indication of the positively experienced mutual support network that formed.

**Benefits for the Course Instructor**

Flexibility. The course instructor also found the course workload to be flexible in that its structure meant greater manageability in the context of a busy schedule. The time commitment in the first two courses tended to be front-loaded, assisting participants in getting started with the course, but then moved into a more routine flow

once everyone knew what was expected and became accustomed to the web format. By the third course offering, more students appeared accustomed with the computer mediated learning modality and the emphasis switched to more of a supportive and interactive role in the discussion forums.

Recruitment of new field instructors and placement settings. Another benefit for the course instructor was related to the accessibility of the course for participants and recruitment of field instructors. Web delivery enabled people from a wider geographic area to enroll, in urban and, most significantly, in rural regions of the province, and, by doing so, to become eligible to serve as field instructors for students, thus increasing and diversifying the pool of available placements for the School.

**Limitations for Participants**

No computer at home. A number of participant reported that they did not have access to a computer or Internet at home. For some with very busy workloads, doing the course from their workplace presented real challenges and resulted in delays in getting postings and readings completed within a reasonable period of time.

Unfamiliarity with web courses. Most of the participants reported they had never taken a web course, and so were not familiar with the technology, vocabulary, or methods of the course. Although the numerous phone calls and email messages to the course instructor or the institutional distance learning helpline quickly resolved their problems, the lack of familiarity with a web course created anxiety for some and perhaps negatively affected their initial engagement.

Length and scheduling of the course. The most frequently cited limitation to participants' satisfaction with the course was the length of the course (30 weeks in the first pilot offering, 26 weeks in the second and 15 weeks in the third course), which was considered "daunting" and "time-consuming" given that all individuals were

working full time in social work positions while enrolled in the course. All participants who provided evaluation feedback recommended that the course be condensed and shortened in its duration. For example, the first component of the course was planned for delivery in the summer semester (April to August) and it created some difficulties in keeping up with the course work during the vacation period. One participant stated, "in terms of my feedback on the course layout and content, it was very difficult starting the course in the summer. Because I took 4 weeks holidays in August, I was behind in the course for quite a period of time and found it difficult to get back on track." By the third offering the comments still reflected the length of the course but students were acknowledging that the content was too valuable to abbreviate.

### Limitations for the Course Instructor

Unfamiliarity with web courses. The course instructor also was learning to use web technology for course delivery, and, therefore, used numerous hours becoming familiar with the course format and structure in order to be a resource for the participants. Fortunately, like the participants, the instructor could rely upon the distance learning help lines and instructional designers for answers to technical and delivery questions.

Time demands. The School of Social Work provided the human resources for the curriculum development, course delivery and the administration of the course. Early in the first course, for example, the course instructor spent a good deal of time contacting participants who had signed up but were not responding online. The purpose of the phone calls was to assess their willingness and interest in continuing with the course and to encourage their engagement, especially in the online discussions as it was the only evidence of their participation. As well, it should be noted that the course instructor continued to offer the 2 day (12 hours) traditional classroom format field education course on a yearly basis concurrent with the web course.

Course length. The course presented challenges for the instructor in having to maintain initially a 30-week (2 semester) time duration of momentum of the course Units, and also of the participants' interest and attention.

### Lessons Learned/Critical Reflections.

Many challenges were encountered and lessons learned regarding this leading edge initiative. At the core, a willingness to explore new and creative ways to meet the challenges was essential at every step in the process. Lessons for the project team have been generated from multiple sources in terms of the institutional and professional community context and contribution, and the collaborative online course design and delivery.

### Lesson 1

Support for distance education within the institutional culture is essential. The operation of the infrastructure required to construct this multidimensional course was influenced by four main design elements: institutional mission, in-school partnerships, institutional expertise and support systems, and clear communication. To the design team's good fortune, this initiative was complemented by a university having both an institutional philosophy and the technical infrastructure that supported distance course delivery, although the funding challenge of the design and delivery of the course posed some challenges initially, and sparked many discussions about cost-recovery.

Institutional infrastructure relative to technical and design expertise was an essential core element in the development of the course. The importance became clear of the need for understanding and formal agreements between designers and deliverers on a variety of matters from actual course content to financial arrangements for developing and delivering the course. Toward the objective of cost recovery, a decision was made to design a course which could be adapted and

rented by other schools of social work. This innovation was build into the design so that it could be transferred easily to other institutions and includes elements pertinent to their respective institutions.

**Lesson 2**

The School of Social Work must be open to new and creative ways of developing and delivering continuing education for the professional community of social workers and educators in urban and rural regions, and to engaging in partnerships to do so. A final significant element was a key institutional/professional partnership. The Social Work Field Instructors' Association (FIA) provided endorsement and encouragement for this initiative across the provincial network of practitioners. It willingly informed its members of the project and encouraged their support and input to the course design. An essential aspect of the design process was this enthusiasm and willingness of field instructors affiliated with the School to advise on the curriculum and delivery mode. For example, the FIA assisted in determining the extent of computer and Internet access available to field instructors across the province to assess the feasibility for them of this web delivery mode for professional development. As a result, field instructors and other agency personnel became partners in the curriculum resource development, one example being that some readily volunteered to play a role in one of the video vignettes for the course.

Likewise, the design team were challenged to step out of the traditional mode of course delivery and curriculum design to create an online and non-academic credit course. The major challenge was developing the content in an accessible format and ensuring that the time commitment for course completion was connected realistically to workplace realities and access to technology of the participants. Carefully seeking and listening to feedback from participants (completers and drop outs) was critical in shaping this course.

**Lesson 3**

Perseverance and patience are required to work with a design team in order to blend social work approaches and language into a noncredit professional development web-delivered course. Both the technical and content experts had to "go outside the box" collaboratively to find alternative ways to modify the technology to suit the content, in essence to ensure that the technology did not drive or limit the design. The institutional partnerships resulted in the garnering of the requisite expertise and technical support for course formatting and delivery. Another key partnership was the technical translator, the instructional designer (ID). The ID role, ideally, is to inform the process and share expertise on the best way to deliver the proposed curriculum. However, the non-credit nature of the course challenged the translation of components from a credit based to a non-credit based modality. This required many occasions of contact to clarify jargon and intention regarding component parts of the course. For example, the established practice of grading students' work in credit courses was a practice that did not fit with this curriculum. The project team and university partners were challenged to reconcile the presentation of academic content, course format, and expectations of participants in a non-credit course with delivery practices typical of the educational approach in credit course offerings. At times, friction and mutual frustration arose around the project team's adherence to their notions of academic freedom and instructional design conventions.

Similarly, it was apparent that terminology could be misinterpreted easily between the design partners. For example, the power in language of calling course registrants 'participants' rather than 'students', and use of the term 'evaluation', versus 'grading', required constant clarification. While it is clear to those who are familiar with social work field education concepts, it required ongoing design translation to ensure understand-

ing that the course would be taken by people who would be in a somewhat parallel instructional situation with "real" students of the university.

The design of the facilitated learning process in this course does not match the pre-developed web delivery credit course models for WebCT. Also, tensions may have arisen between the online instructional design approaches and the project team related to perceptions of "who is paying the piper", the reality being that, in fact, there are preset institutional parameters for funding design elements such as graphics, videos, and print supplements. It is critical to have a clear line of communication interdepartmentally as well as interdepartmentally.

### Lesson 4

Create mechanisms and partnerships to negotiate a home for the course where it can be marketed modified, delivered, evaluated, in order to ensure relevance and longevity for course content and administration. All parties needed to recognize the pioneering nature of this course. The financial issues included: 1) up-front money and cost recovery for the marketing, administration and technical support of the course; 2) cost to field instructors for the course; 3) payment for online course learning tools such as the Learning Skills Inventory; 4) rental cost for the course to other schools; and 5) remuneration and ownership for the course development project team.

As this course was ground-breaking for the School and its institutional delivery partner, the Division of Lifelong Learning, the support of the Director of the School of Social Work was critical in clarifying matters relative to the funding of the original design and future delivery of the course. Lifelong Learning contributed technical mechanisms, its extensive marketing plan, and experience "renting " courses to other institutions, enabling the course to be advertised and administered officially on a non-credit basis. DELT, the other critical institutional partner, provided the technical perspective and instructional design

support to the project team, as well as the requisite technical support for course participants.

### Lesson 5

Explore partnerships beyond the institution and recognize that the wheel does not need to be reinvented. There is a common knowledge base on Field Instruction within social work education. Schools of Social Work can construct opportunities to explore ways to pool their collective resources to develop courses "to rent" or to share, and to forge new approaches to professional development with one another.

### Recommendations

A professional development non-credit course on field instruction was made accessible to field instructors province-wide using the internet. This innovative endeavour required the collaboration of several partners, including two faculty curriculum designers, a field program coordinator, field instructors, the university's Division of Lifelong Learning and Distance Education and Learning Technologies (DELT) departments, as well as the support of the School of Social Work. Conclusions reached following three pilot offerings of the course are presented from three perspectives: curriculum development, instructional design, and course implementation.

1. Curriculum Development. The length and timing of the course may be crucial to participants' decision to enroll and to complete it. Feedback from those in the pilot offerings suggested that an 8 - 10 week time frame would fit better with other work demands. Although most recommended condensing the time frame of the course, several commented that they would prefer to keep the online discussion forums to the two-week time frame as presently designed. The core challenge is accommodating participants' work and personal schedules without compromising the content and usefulness of the course, and in particular, the parallel learning process intended by

having participants do Part I in preparation for a student, and then Part II once the student has begun. Evaluation of participants also may be reconsidered in order that appropriate recognition is given for completion, and that certain competencies have been gained from taking the course.

2. Instructional Design. The course may be enhanced by a face to face component built in to enable real time spontaneous discussion. One respondent stated, "I know that the web design allows the freedom to reach geographically across the island and Labrador, however, I would have enjoyed a one day or one-half day face to face session…. Perhaps some of the units could be covered in that format in a condensed version." Depending on where participants may be clustered, it would bear considering to offer a classroom setting for a half or whole day event. Other technologies could be investigated that provide the facility of face to face contact, for example, Elluminate Live. A tele/video conference also could be incorporated into the course, especially for those participants who are dispersed in rural regions. In discussion with some of the participants it was recommended that Part I be delivered primarily in a teleconference format with readings and some online discussion done prior to sessions. This live component provided early in the course and perhaps periodically throughout, could assist participants in developing and sustaining mutual support among themselves. This suggestion was acted upon in the third offering of the course and was found to be well received by the participants as demonstrated by all students who started the course completing the course. Ensuring that enrollees understand the nature of the course from the start, and that they have accessibility to a computer, ideally at home and office, also were factors whose importance became very clear in facilitating participants' success in completing the course.

3. Course Implementation. Commencing a

web-based course requires two key elements. First, that the course instructor is not only versed in the course content but is also orientated to the WEBCT delivery modality. Second, it is important not to make assumptions about the nature of technology available to course participants/ student regarding their computer, Internet access and familiarity with Web CT. Interestingly, many of the BSW and MSW courses are currently being offered using the WEB CT. Future field instructors, therefore, will be more likely to be familiar with this modality. For those course participants the online learning curve gap will be bridged.

**Conclusion**

A combination of trends already is evident in social work education and continuing education: increasing numbers of students accessing social work courses through distance offerings, the demand for field placements from more remote locations, declining professional development dollars for field instructors to travel to access training, and increasing comfort with the web as a course delivery mechanism. The World Wide Web has become a part of our lives at home, in our workplaces, and in educational settings. Its use for providing accessible and flexible education in social work Field Instruction is recognized. From this base, social work educators and practitioners will continue to be challenged to explore new ways to maximize the use of technology to support field education for our profession.

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