Learning From a Challenging Fieldwork Evaluation Experience
A Student's and an Instructor's Perspectives

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Abstract: The use of fieldwork experiences has been widely accepted by teachers of evaluation as a method of preparing future practitioners for challenges encountered in the field. However, several challenges must be addressed to make fieldwork experiences a useful tool in preparing students for their professional careers. The authors present a case study in which a graduate student in an evaluation class approached an agency seeking a fieldwork project. The experience was not positive. Both a student's and an instructor's perspectives are offered in understanding the reasons for the negative experience. Suggestions are provided from both perspectives as to how the experience could have been improved. The article is intended as a teaching tool to be provided by instructors to students seeking applied experiences before approaching agencies. This article provides an opportunity for student evaluators to learn from the experiences of another student; likewise, the instructor in this case study provides insights that other instructors of evaluation may find helpful.

Keywords: *fieldwork experiences; fieldwork challenges; student challenges; teaching evaluation*

For decades, fieldwork experiences have been common requirements in the curricula of a variety of academic degrees. The nomenclature for these experiential learning experiences varies as a function of discipline and includes, but is not limited to, internships, externships, service learning opportunities, rotations, cooperative education, practicum experiences, residencies, and clerkships (Glenwick & Hallauer, 1976; Kramer & Ryabik, 1981; Masters, Stillman, Browning, & Davis, 2005; Matsumura, Callister, Palmer, Cox, & Larsen, 2004; Meyer, 1985; Shipley et al., 2005; Sidwell & Cantoni, 1958). The underlying assumption of fieldwork experiences is that the classroom setting does not provide students with sufficient practice to build the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively outside the academic setting; therefore, such experiences offer students an opportunity to understand the application of classroom

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theory in the workplace. Fieldwork experiences allow students to build necessary skills under supervision in a safe learning environment in which the opportunity to do harm is minimized. In addition to developing an applied skills set, the advantages of fieldwork experiences for students include increasing their personal knowledge of employment-related services, increasing their understanding of the employment process as viewed by employers, and affording them an opportunity to realize how to interact in a sometimes imperfect work setting (Meyer, 1985). From an employer's viewpoint, fieldwork experiences offer both pros and cons. On one hand, such experiences can be disruptive to the normal work environment, can make staff members insecure about their own skill sets, and can add to the workload of already resource-strapped staff members, especially in cases of problem students (Meyer, 1985). On the other hand, some employers see fieldwork experiences as an opportunity for recruitment, as a resource for assisting with clients, and as a source of stimulation for staff members (Meyer, 1985).

Fieldwork experiences are frequently incorporated in evaluation training courses, especially at the graduate level (Darabi, 2002; Kelley & Jones, 1992; Trevisan, 2004). The use of fieldwork experiences has been widely accepted by teachers of evaluation as a method of preparing future practitioners for challenges encountered in the field. Explicit knowledge regarding evaluation theories and methods can be easily analyzed and articulated in classroom settings. However, tacit knowledge—knowledge that has been internalized and may be difficult to express verbally—is more easily gained through practice and experience (Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003). Students require personal practice to gain necessary evaluation skills, such as solving problems; establishing client trust; developing protocols; writing reports; and other technical, interpersonal, and communicative skills (Gredler & Johnson, 2001; Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003; Trevisan, 2002).

Several approaches have been proposed in the literature to provide practical evaluation training for students, including simulation, role-play, single course projects, and practicum experiences (Alkin & Christie, 2002; Gredler & Johnson, 2001; Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003; Trevisan, 2004; Willer, Bartlett, & Northman, 1978). In the case study currently presented, the fieldwork experience is in the form of a single evaluation course project; the details of the course structure are now described.

Course Structure

One requirement in a masters of public health program is a yearlong course in applied program planning and evaluation. The first half of the course is offered in the spring semester (January to April) in the 1st year of the 2-year master's degree. The second half of the course begins in the fall semester (September to December) of the 2nd year of the program. Both the first and second halves of the course are taught by two different instructors with expertise in program planning and evaluation. The course is taught via Instructional Interactive Television (IITV), and equal numbers of students are located at both the host and remote locations. A course facilitator is provided at the remote site to support the students throughout the yearlong course. This case study focuses on the challenges faced by a student located at the remote site.

The first half of the course is theory based, discussing concepts and models of program planning and evaluation. The second half of the course is designed for students to gain (a) experience with public health service and/or research programs via field projects and (b) knowledge about evaluation theories and models through class lectures. The second half of the course is the focus of this case study.

The two-semester course sequence is very deliberate. Students enrolled in the first half of the course are informed in the spring about the required fieldwork project in the fall, thus providing them with several months of lead time to begin investigating fieldwork opportunities. Also, by

offering the applied course in the fall semester, students have an opportunity to extend their commitments with agencies through the spring semester of the 2nd year of the program in the form of internships, which are also a requirement of the program. This is the resulting situation for about two thirds of the students taking the course. Thus, the course structure is often mutually beneficial, because agencies receive longer time commitments and greater continuity, while students have the opportunity to fulfill course and internship requirements.

In the second half of the course, students attend classroom sessions devoted to topics in evaluation. The classroom sessions meet once a week for 150 minutes. The fact that the class meets only once per week makes it possible for students to commit 6 to 8 hours per week to agencies. Enrollment in the applied course varies from 5 to 12 students. Given the time commitment required from the instructor, it is doubtful that the course would be feasible for enrollments larger than 15 students.

The first few classes of the applied course are dedicated to presenting a logic modeling process with which the instructor has had much success applying to several program planning and evaluation projects. This process can be applied to a variety of project types, including planning or improving programs and assessing accountability. Although many students choose to use this model in their fieldwork projects, and its use is encouraged, it is emphasized that other planning and evaluation models may be used. Case-based learning is used in the majority of the remaining classroom sessions. The case studies are based on projects with which the instructor was directly involved and include issues related to ethics, measurement, reporting, and so forth. After presenting the context of a case, students are challenged to identify the issues and then discuss how these issues might be resolved.

Students are also expected to meet individually with the instructor for 1 hour each week to discuss the projects on which they are working. The students at the remote site meet weekly with the course facilitator, who has experience in program planning and evaluation. The instructor travels to the remote site several times a semester to meet with the students individually. The focus of these meetings is to discuss barriers that a student may be experiencing in his or her project and to identify strategies to overcome these challenges. Both the instructor and course facilitator remain accessible by e-mail or telephone should problems arise between weekly meetings.

Background of the Agency

To fulfill the applied evaluation requirement in the fall semester, the student arranged a fieldwork experience with a local agency. To protect the anonymity of the agency, the names of the agency and people involved are not identified. The agency provides a variety of health services and serves all populations throughout the county. The agency has an extensive history of community outreach and has formed several partnerships with the local university and community colleges to address community health needs. A structured internship program was established by the agency to provide students with practical training in serving health programs. The typical internship consists of familiarizing students with the history, structure, and operations of the agency to prepare students for careers with the agency. Several students from the health promotion department at the local university had successfully completed internships with the agency; previous projects included reviewing and revising program materials and implementing health promotion curriculum. One student from the evaluation course had previously used this site for a fieldwork project; however, this student was already employed by the agency before beginning the applied project (R. Billowitz, personal communication, May 31, 2005).

Context of the Case Study

The Student's Perspective

I encountered several challenges while establishing and completing my fieldwork project. The first difficulty was in understanding the expectations of the course. Throughout the spring semester, several guest speakers were broadcast via IITV. One such speaker was the instructor for the second half of the course, to be offered in the fall semester. After presenting on program evaluation theories, the instructor spent 30 minutes discussing the format of the second half of the course, including the fieldwork requirement. However, after this class, I did not understand that the fall instructor expected students to individually establish fieldwork projects over the summer months. When I discussed the fieldwork requirement with the local faculty, I was under the impression that it was not necessary to locate a project until the fall course actually began and that students were expected to join already established projects affiliated with the university and the department. Therefore, I did not attempt to establish a relationship with an agency until the beginning of the fall semester.

As a result of this misunderstanding, I had more difficulty in establishing a fieldwork project than my classmates. This was further complicated by the fact that I was an out-of-state student and had little knowledge of the opportunities available. Many of my classmates were local to the area, were already working on public health projects, and had established credibility and trust within the community. Several of my classmates were able to extend their preexisting relationships with their communities and work sites to include applied evaluation experiences to fulfill course requirements. In my situation, it was necessary to approach unfamiliar agencies and program staff members to locate a fieldwork project.

When I learned that I was to make individual arrangements with an agency in establishing a fieldwork project, I contacted the director of a county agency by telephone and explained that I was a graduate student enrolled in an evaluation course that required a placement with a community-based project. In this first telephone contact, the director agreed to meet in person to discuss project opportunities.

In our first face-to-face meeting, I presented myself to the director as a student seeking assistance in fulfilling requirements for an evaluation class project. I expressed interest in assisting the agency with any appropriate, available project that had an evaluation component so that I could meet the class requirements. During this initial meeting, I did not emphasize the fact that this was to be a fieldwork placement but rather that it was class project.

During this initial meeting, the agency director and I decided on a project that met the requirements of the evaluation class. A local ordinance had been recently passed that was designed to regulate a source of contamination in certain businesses. Business owners were required to pass knowledge tests on the contaminant, apply for operating licenses, and pass annual inspections. The agency needed to know if these strategies were consistent with the objectives of the ordinance. At this time, I felt confident that I understood the scope and challenge of the evaluation; the agency was not interested so much in the outcome of the ordinance as in the appropriateness of the program strategies in targeting the objectives of the ordinance.

A second meeting was scheduled for the following week between the agency director, the program coordinator responsible for helping implement the ordinance, and myself to discuss my roles in the project. I did not request to meet with the program coordinator prior to this second meeting to discuss her perspective on this project.

Because I felt confident that I understood the scope of the problem, I felt that I could propose an evaluation plan during the second meeting. The course instructor and I held an individual meeting to discuss possible evaluation strategies that would address the challenge faced by the

agency. This meeting was conducted face to face, as the instructor traveled to my location to meet with several of the local students. On the basis of the information I reported from the initial meeting with the agency, the instructor and I laid out the framework for the evaluation proposal to be given in the next meeting with the agency director and program coordinator.

At the second meeting, the agency director, the program coordinator, and I were in attendance. I distributed a document detailing the three stages of the proposed evaluation plan and discussed each stage of the plan. Throughout the proposal of each stage of the evaluation plan, there were several indicators that the director and coordinator were resistant to the plan.

The first stage of the plan included identifying the exact purpose of the evaluation so that our efforts could be focused. During this meeting, neither the director nor the program coordinator could agree on the exact problem on which we were to concentrate. This was a difficulty that remained unresolved throughout my involvement with the project.

The second stage of the plan called for interviewing key stakeholders involved in the ordinance. The director and program coordinator agreed that interviewing different agencies with similar ordinances would be helpful in identifying successful program strategies. However, I also recommended interviewing the business owners who were affected by the ordinance. I suggested this for two reasons: (a) The business owners were content experts who could provide valuable information about creating stronger program strategies, and (b) interviewing them might produce better buy-in to the enforcement of the ordinance. The director and program coordinator were resistant to these suggested interviews because (a) they could not understand how the business owners would provide any additional useful information, and (b) buy-in among the business owners was not necessary because the ordinance had to be enforced regardless of business support. With some discussion, however, the director and program coordinator agreed that I could conduct interviews with the business owners if, as they put it, "that was what your instructor wanted."

The third stage of the proposed evaluation plan was to compare the results of the interviews with the current program strategies. For example, if several key stakeholders noted that a given condition could contribute to being exposed to a contaminant, then current program strategies could be analyzed to see if they addressed that condition. When I explained this stage to the director and program coordinator, I described the process as checking for "holes, gaps, and weaknesses" in the current program, terms used by the instructor in class to explain this stage of the evaluation method. I mentioned that after this process, the final product would be a report recommending "changes" to the program strategies currently used to address the objectives of the ordinance. At that point, the overall tone of the discussion shifted to a defensive, almost argumentative, format.

Although both the director and the program coordinator appeared defensive and reluctant to accept the evaluation proposal, they did eventually agree to the plan because, as they put it, "we want to help you meet class requirements." I felt confident that the director and program coordinator understood the stages involved in the evaluation process, although I did recognize that they seemed reluctant to commit to those stages. Because they had given me verbal approval of the evaluation proposal, I scheduled a series of weekly meetings with the director and program coordinator so that all parties remained informed throughout the process. I assumed that as the project progressed, the information I collected using this evaluation method would prove useful to the program and alleviate their discomfort.

Three weekly meetings were subsequently held. The director did not attend any of the weekly meetings, so the program coordinator and I attempted to further develop the evaluation project. However, the program coordinator was often visibly upset during these meetings and would express her reluctance to participate. When asked about her discomfort, the program

coordinator informed me that she was offended that a student would come in and look for "problems" in her program.

Several challenges prevented the evaluation plan from proceeding past the first stage. Scheduling interviews among key stakeholders was a difficult task. The program coordinator stated that she did not want the interviews to be conducted but would allow it so that I could fulfill my class requirements. It was directly said to me that any information I gathered in the interviews would not be used by the agency; any information gained from the interviews would be for the sole benefit of my passing the class. For any interviews I wished to conduct, I was to say that it was for a class project and not affiliated with the agency. The information I did produce from some interviews and literature searches was rejected. Additionally, the program coordinator requested that I take on work responsibilities that were unconnected to the evaluation project, such as making and distributing brochures, copying training manuals, and collecting reports on unrelated programs. This was upsetting to me because I believed that my sole responsibility would be to conduct the evaluation. As a result of these challenges, the evaluation project did not proceed according to plan, and several deadlines were not met.

At this point, it was clear that their agreement to the evaluation plan stemmed from their willingness to assist me in meeting class requirements rather than from the expectation that I could offer any useful skills to the program. It was apparent that the program coordinator and I had different objectives regarding the fieldwork experience. The situation had become distressing for both parties, and a decision needed to be made regarding the continuation of the project. The course instructor and I met to discuss these problems, and it was decided that a meeting should be scheduled among all parties to clarify objectives regarding the evaluation project.

I felt that it was necessary to include a credible evaluator in the meeting who was knowledgeable about the evaluation method and the course requirements; however, the meeting was scheduled for a time that the course instructor could not attend because of the travel logistics involved. The instructor and I invited the local course facilitator to the meeting, because she had been involved both in the course for several years and in my fieldwork project throughout the semester. I informed the agency director and program coordinator that the course facilitator would be attending this meeting.

The director, program coordinator, course facilitator, and I attended this meeting. As the meeting began, the director and program coordinator verbally expressed their resentment with the course facilitator being in attendance. The director and the program coordinator also expressed their displeasure with the way in which my involvement with the project was progressing. A discussion of this topic revealed that the source of their displeasure stemmed from the fact that I was not performing usual student intern activities. The director explained that the agency had established guidelines and expectations for students to work as interns; because I was a student, it was anticipated that I too would follow those expectations. The director informed me that unless I fulfilled those student intern roles, the project would not be able to continue. It also came to light that for organizational reasons, the agency was not necessarily interested in conducting any evaluation on this ordinance; the agreement concerning my involvement with the project had stemmed from their understanding that I would be assisting with other functions. I informed the director and program coordinator that I would need some time to reevaluate my expectations and goals for a fieldwork and internship placement before making a decision to continue this project.

The day after the meeting, the instructor and I discussed the problems and issues surrounding the situation. These issues included the agency's lack of commitment to the evaluation project, dissatisfaction of the project from both parties, disagreements about work responsibilities, and the lack of trust between the agency and myself. In assessing these issues, the instructor and

I concluded that the best course of action was to terminate the project. This decision was documented in an e-mail sent to the director and program coordinator.

Lessons Learned

Using the context of the case study, we delineate several challenges in conducting fieldwork evaluation experiences. Both the student's and instructor's perspectives are offered in understanding each challenge. Indicators, or "red flags," that fieldwork projects may not be proceeding according to plan are given. Suggestions are then provided from both perspectives as to how the experience could be improved for future fieldwork placements. The challenges and suggestions for improvement are summarized in Table 1.

Challenge 1: Understanding Course Expectations

It is important for students to understand the requirements of the course and the fieldwork project so that they may value the applied experience. Without an understanding of these expectations, students may not feel that the fieldwork experience is meaningful to their professional development. Misunderstandings regarding project expectations may strain the relationship between the student and instructor (Trevisan, 2004). Misunderstandings about course expectations may undermine the instructor's ability to act as a mentor and to provide a safe and productive learning environment. Establishing clear guidelines and expectations allows for greater mutual respect between students and instructors, because each party understands that he or she shares a responsibility to achieve optimal learning (Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003). To emphasize the importance of the fieldwork evaluation experience as a professional development tool and to establish a strong mentoring relationship, course expectations must be clearly delineated.

One expectation was that the graduate students in this evaluation course were to begin seeking fieldwork experiences in the spring and summer months. A commonly cited problem with single course evaluation projects is the difficulty in accomplishing valuable learning experiences in a short amount of time (Gredler & Johnson, 2001; Trevisan, 2002). For this reason, students were to have projects established by the start of the fall semester so that time could be optimally used in working on projects.

Misunderstandings about the course requirements led the student to delay seeking out a fieldwork project until the fall. These misunderstandings may have undermined the project from the very beginning in several ways. First, the student did not understand the emphasis of the fieldwork project being a professional development experience. Rather, the student viewed it as a class project, which may have detracted from the project's perceived value to the student. Second, the instructor and student had differing expectations on establishing a fieldwork project: The instructor believed that the student was seeking out a project, whereas the student believed that she would be provided with a project. This situation may have initially harmed the student-instructor relationship by leading each party to believe that the other was not fulfilling his or her responsibility. Third, by the time the student sought out a project, very little time remained to identify the agency's needs, gain its trust and cooperation, and propose an evaluation plan. This situation may have hindered the working relationship between the student and the agency.

Lessons learned from the student's perspective. In retrospect, the largest indicator that there were misunderstandings about the course was the distinct lack of initial communication regard-

Table 1

Summary of Fieldwork Challenges, Indicators of Problems, and Recommendations

Challenge	Potential Problems	Indicators	Recommendations for Students	Recommendations for Instructors
Challenge 1: Understanding course expectations	Fieldwork experience loses value Strained instructor-student relationship Delay in establishing fieldwork placement	Student views as "class project" Lack of communication regarding course expectations	Request collaboration with instructor via face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, e-mails	Schedule face-to-face individual briefings with students to review course expectations and timelines and procedures for project
Challenge 2: Gaining entry to a field work setting	Locating fieldwork sponsor Trust and credibility difficult to establish Project and role of student not properly presented	Agencies act defensive, hostile, or offended Emphasis on "student" rather than "professional" role Emphasis on "class project" rather than "fieldwork"	Network with classmates Role-play presentations with classmates	Consider collaborating with students on projects that instructor is currently working on Build networks connecting past students Create network of past students and fieldwork sites Include interpersonal skill building prior to start of project
Challenge 3: Differing student and agency project expectations	Agencies uncommitted to fieldwork project Project does not meet student's learning needs Project does not meet agency's organizational needs	Students requested to complete work outside scope of project Frequent disagreements regarding work responsibilities	Develop written agreements detailing project conditions	Draft templates of formal agreements Introduce and practice negotiating skills
Challenge 4: Adjusting classroom life to work-site environments	Classroom discussions not adapted for use at work sites Use of inappropriate descriptions of evaluation and other concepts	Agencies act defensive, hostile, or offended	Role-play presentations with classmates	Provide suggestions on how to sensitively communicate concepts to agencies Consider requiring prerequisite course in interpersonal communication
Challenge 5: Project termination	Difficult to determine when termination is appropriate		Collaborate closely with instructor to make informed decision and terminate in professional manner	Present case studies regarding issues of termination Role-play situations involving termination

ing the fieldwork project between the instructor and myself. In reading several articles on the methodological issues of evaluation fieldwork experiences, the key component to successful experiences is the close communication between students and instructors regarding fieldwork projects (Gredler & Johnson, 2001; Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003; Preskill, 1992). Although we had regular communication after the project commenced, only a short segment of one class session was devoted to discussing the course requirements. During the time between that class session in the spring semester and the start of class in the fall semester, there was no communication between the instructor and myself.

I would recommend to future students who find themselves in a similar situation to collaborate with the instructor leading the fieldwork experience at an early date, especially if the theoretical and applied sections of a course are taught by different instructors. This is important because, as I perceived in this case, the separate instructors may present different perspectives on the applied section of the course. Long distance arrangements between students and instructors, such as in the current case, may require reliance on e-mail and telephone contact. I would have found it helpful if this initial collaboration had occurred face to face, so travel may be required in long distance situations.

The discussion of course requirements occurred over IITV, with the instructor located at a different site. This setting did not manage to convey the salience of the fieldwork project. I would suggest that instructors schedule briefing meetings for future fieldwork students in the semester prior to commencement of the applied work. These meetings could cover course requirements, timelines for completing the requirements, and procedures on how to meet the requirements. Inexperienced students, such as in my case, may not inherently understand such procedures, and this will allow students to realize what steps need to be accomplished by what dates.

Lessons learned from the instructor's perspective. Having students engage agencies early is critical to a successful experience. For this reason, I contacted the instructor of the prerequisite course in the spring semester and asked permission to provide a 30-minute presentation of the expectations in the upcoming fall course. I recognize that it takes time to build a relationship with an agency and that not all relationships will be successful. It has been my experience that students who approach agencies at the start of the fall semester are feeling an inordinate amount of pressure to secure fieldwork projects. This stress causes many students to simply agree to the proposed scope of work of the agency, no matter how far removed some of that work might be from the focus of the class. The stress is compounded should the relationship fail, because the student now is facing the dilemma of not meeting the course requirements. It is for these reasons that I expect students to establish fieldwork projects during the spring and summer months.

Reading the student's perspective about the challenge of understanding course expectations was very useful. It is clear from the student's perspective that the 30-minute presentation in the spring semester did not convey the necessary sense of urgency in beginning the search for an applied experience. I was more or less perceived as another guest lecturer. The student's suggestions for highlighting the salience of the applied project are excellent. Instead of a 30-minute class presentation, I will schedule individual appointments with students to review the details of what is expected, discuss the interpersonal skills required to work with clients, and assess with the students their capability to apply this array of competencies.

Challenge 2: Gaining Entry to a Fieldwork Setting

One challenge for the single course evaluation project is selecting an appropriate fieldwork project. Projects must be substantive enough to provide students with a realistic view of evalua-

tion in the field but must be of small enough scope to be completed in one semester (Morris, 1992). Typically, teachers of evaluation discuss three approaches to providing students with entry to fieldwork settings: (a) Students arrange their own fieldwork project, (b) instructors organize the fieldwork experience, or (c) instructors locate potential fieldwork settings and students negotiate the projects (Kelley & Jones, 1992; Morris, 1992; Preskill, 1992). In this course, students are asked to arrange their own fieldwork projects because this step can be a valuable learning experience in negotiating evaluation projects (Kelley & Jones, 1992).

Although this approach can be effective in achieving learning goals, several challenges are associated with allowing the students to arrange their own fieldwork projects. The first challenge is in locating a fieldwork setting. Although Kelley and Jones (1992) reported that their students had little difficulty in finding fieldwork sponsors, the majority of those students are employed at organizations at which they may extend their work commitments to include evaluation projects. This is similar to the experience of the instructor of this course in that many students are able to expand on their usual work responsibilities for fieldwork projects. However, this case study shows that students without related employment or connections to appropriate agencies may have difficulties in finding a fieldwork project.

The second challenge is establishing trust and credibility with an agency. A substantial difference exists between a student being asked to join an evaluation project (for which the agency self-imposes the evaluation) and a student requesting to join or plan an evaluation project (for which an outside person imposes the evaluation) (Ulschak & Weiss, 1976). Agencies may be tentative about accepting students who request to work on evaluation projects; this may be due to the negative connotations associated with evaluation. Program staff members may fear being found ineffective in their work or having their programs changed, which may put agencies on the defensive (Taut & Alkin, 2003; Ulschak & Weiss, 1976). Agencies may also fear that students will disrupt the normal work environment, add to staff members' workloads, or make staff members insecure about their own skill sets (Meyer, 1985). Agencies sponsoring fieldwork projects may also be wary of allowing students to handle sensitive information (Preskill, 1992). These issues of trust may make it difficult for students to gain entry to potential fieldwork sites.

Establishing credibility with agencies can also be problematic for students arranging fieldwork projects. Agency staff members may not view students as committed professionals offering valuable skills. Preskill (1992) alluded to this fact when describing how agency staff members initially referred to class members simply as "students." It was only after the students gained credibility with the agency that program staff members viewed them as "professional adults" (p. 41). Darabi (2005) noted that extensive contact with clients was required to assure program staff members of a student's credibility.

Associated with establishing trust and credibility is the third challenge: the way in which students present themselves to and interact with potential fieldwork sites. Conducting professional meetings is challenging for students (Darabi, 2002), and students require guidance in their interactions with agency staff members (Darabi, 2005). To gain credibility, students must be perceived as being professional in their communications with clients. This can be a difficult situation, however, because students on fieldwork assignments are fulfilling two roles: student and professional. These two roles may be seen as inconsistent and conflicting with each other (Mackenzie, 2002). As a result, students may be confused about their roles and about how they should interact with the fieldwork agency, as students or as professionals.

Lessons learned from the student's perspective. Finding a sponsor for my fieldwork project was challenging because I did not have the professional connections some of my classmates did. I would recommend that students in similar situations use their instructors or other classmates as network connections to identify potential fieldwork sites. It may be that an agency has

multiple needs or that the scope of a project is too large for one student to handle. It also may be helpful if students from previous semesters discuss the possibility of current students continuing established projects with agencies. In this way, agencies would already be prepared for additional students, which may make it easier for students to gain entry to those sites.

It may also be helpful for previous students to talk about their experiences with specific agencies with current students. In this case, a previous student had used the same agency as I did for a fieldwork experience. It may have been helpful to gain this person's perspective on the agency; he may have given me insights on the work environment, organizational politics, and typical job responsibilities. As it was, I did not know that this connection was available to investigate the potential fieldwork site. It may be helpful for instructors to keep the contact information of previous students so that they may be connected with current students seeking fieldwork projects with the same agency.

At first impression, gaining entry to my selected fieldwork site was easy: I called the agency, and the director asked when I could start. After the initial challenge of locating a sponsoring agency, I was relieved that the agency was so willing to supply me with a project. I now realize, however, that gaining entry to an agency is not as simple as obtaining approval from the director.

The first difficulty I encountered was in establishing my role with the agency. At the beginning of the semester, I did not understand the expectation that the fieldwork project was to be used as a gateway into a professional career. Rather, I viewed the experience as another class project, and I emphasized this fact to the agency. I presented myself as a student to the agency, and this was how they viewed me. The fact that they viewed me as a student was indicated by statements such as "Is this what your instructor wants?" and "Is this required for your class project?" Later, when I realized that I wanted to use this fieldwork project as a professional experience, I found it difficult to change the agency's perception of the project and myself. Trying to shift from a student role to a professional role halfway through the project created tension and resentment between the agency and myself.

The second difficulty was in gaining the agency's trust, which was much more difficult that I had anticipated. This was bluntly apparent in program staff members saying that they were offended that I was on the project. This was also indicated by the fact I was instructed to conduct interviews but not inform the participants that I was affiliated with the agency. It was apparent that the agency lacked confidence in my professional skills, which decreased the agency's trust and acceptance of the evaluation process.

I also realize now that I should have approached my instructor sooner for assistance when I realized that I was not being accepted and trusted by project staff members. By initially trying to remedy the situation on my own put me in a worse situation. I would recommend that students in similar situations use their instructors' experience in establishing trust and acceptance among project staff members. It is probably most helpful if students approach their instructors with specific examples and details of the challenges they are facing and communicate the exact details of the situation rather than a summary. More details given can allow an instructor to put the challenges in context and provide clear advice or assistance.

Lessons learned from the instructor's perspective. For students who are having trouble finding agency experiences, I offer an opportunity to collaborate with me on evaluation projects on which I am working. From an instructor's perspective, this is a double-edged sword. I really want students to gain valuable applied experience by independently engaging agencies. But because I provide the opportunity to work on one of my projects, students will not necessarily gain this experience. Furthermore, an instructor must be wary of offering these opportunities too soon. To do so can be viewed as an instructor exploiting students for his or her own gain. I

therefore do not mention opportunities to become involved in my evaluation projects until after students have exhausted their own avenues.

I will discuss including a more structured emphasis on interpersonal skills with the instructor in the spring semester, including student role-play to support higher levels of student confidence and successful skill application in their relationships with agencies in the second semester. Alkin and Christie (2002) used role-playing exercises as an effective tool for student evaluators to develop and practice interpersonal and technical skills. In this way, classmates can provide one another with feedback on the communications planned with the agency: the initial introduction, the discussion of fieldwork expectations, and the evaluation proposal.

One suggestion offered by the student is that perhaps the instructor's experience in approaching agencies can be exploited. This suggestion could be interpreted in a variety of ways. First, instructors could share their experiences didactically. This is what I have in fact done through discussing case studies in class. However, another interpretation of this suggestion is that instructors accompany students to the initial meetings with agencies. As an instructor, I shy away from this option for three reasons. First, I believe that students will be better prepared if they know that they do not have someone else to rely on. Second, this is a graduate course. On graduating, students will be entering the workforce. Learning how to approach agencies will benefit students when they begin seeking employment. Finally, including the instructor in these early meetings can, in the eyes of the agency, shift the burden of responsibility for the project away from the student and onto the instructor. Although an instructor must assume a certain degree of responsibility for his or her students, being held accountable for the delivery of up to 20 different projects is simply untenable.

In hindsight, I should have taken a more active role in raising the perception of the credibility of the student. I could have done this by scheduling a meeting with the student and agency immediately after the student and agency came to an agreement about fieldwork sponsorship. Although I am not philosophically in favor of meeting the agency with the student, this case study has shown that the danger of damaging an agency relationship is greater than the danger of possibly having to assume greater responsibility. The purpose of this meeting would be to provide the agency with a sense that in addition to the student, it also has access to an experienced evaluator (i.e., the instructor) as a resource. Highlighting the deliverables and accomplishments of past students would also serve to add to the credibility of the class and the student.

Finally, I will build on the student's suggestion to tap into existing networks to identify a fieldwork evaluation experience. Although I have been diligent in tracking former students, many of them have left the geographical proximity of the institution. Thus, current students may not be able to exploit opportunities that past students could now provide. However, I have been reminded in the importance of keeping track of the local agencies for which former students have worked. I will now create a formal inventory and provide this to students during my initial orientation to the course the previous semester.

Challenge 3: Differing Student and Agency Project Expectations

Another challenge in arranging fieldwork experiences is in locating an agency appropriate for fieldwork placements. Fieldwork experiences require intensive resources, especially from clients or fieldwork sponsors, to provide a substantive learning experience (Trevisan, 2004). Successful fieldwork projects require agency support, but recruiting committed agencies that are willing to invest resources into students can be difficult (Darabi, 2005). Students who find that they need to actively recruit sponsoring fieldwork agencies, such as the student in the case study, may find additional problems in locating appropriate fieldwork sites. The difficulty with

recruiting agencies is that it may increase the likelihood of "make-work" fieldwork experiences (Morris, 1992, p. 65). In other words, an agency does not have the commitment or the resources to provide a fieldwork project, so it may request that the student complete work outside the scope of the applied experience. This situation makes it difficult to negotiate a project plan that is acceptable for the learning needs of the student and lowers the value of the fieldwork project.

Lessons learned from the student's perspective. As stated earlier, the agency had frequently employed student interns from the university. This may in fact have been a problem that led to the disagreements between the agency and myself about the my work responsibilities. The structured internship program established by the agency was most likely shaped by its interactions with other university disciplines, which may have very different expectations of students completing fieldwork projects. The agency viewed me as a usual student intern and wanted me to follow the established work expectations for students. This was indicated by the program coordinator requesting that I create and distribute flyers and brochures, write reports on the history of the agency, and job-shadow other divisions in the department, all normal student intern job responsibilities. However, I viewed my involvement with the agency solely in terms of the evaluation project. Just as misunderstandings about course expectations may have strained the instructor-student relationship, the misunderstandings about work responsibilities stressed the relationship between the agency and myself. It would have been helpful in my situation to create a formal agreement regarding project expectations so that all parties understood my work responsibilities so that misunderstandings and feelings of resentment did not occur.

Lessons learned from the instructor's perspective. Until this situation arose, all agreements between students and agencies were informal. What I have learned from this situation is that I must be more diligent in following the evaluation standards, especially for student experiences: Students and agencies need to have written agreements regarding mutual expectations (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994). Useful topics to be included in the agreement might include the purpose of the project, the scope of work, data collection methods, the responsibilities of both the student evaluator and the agency, and a pay rate (if applicable). In the majority of cases, things run smoothly, and the formal agreement does not come into play. However, in the rare instances when things do not go well, a formal agreement will protect all parties, especially the student. That is, if the student has abided to the best of his or her ability by the terms of the agreement, and the project is terminated, the student can still receive credit for meeting the course requirement. I will be consulting with university lawyers for assistance in drafting templates of formal agreements that students can use when negotiating the scope of their commitments with agencies.

From the student's summary, differences of the perception of the fieldwork experience were encountered with the agency. These differences must be dealt with successfully to establish and maintain a positive working relationship with the agency in the evaluation context. The student was not adequately armed with negotiation skills to resolve these differences. Applying the skills of principled negotiation would support the likely resolution of these differences. Conflicting positions are reported by the student very early in her dialogue with the agency, which are more rightly defined as the interests of both sides expressed through their needs, desires, concerns, and fears. Through focusing on the interests, not positions or titles, the student and the agency could creatively identify options that would likely satisfy both parties (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991).

Challenge 4: Adjusting Classroom Life to Work-Site Environments

The tensions between students trying to adapt classroom knowledge to the workplace have been well documented. Students require assistance in applying technical skills, theories, and models to fieldwork projects (Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003; Mackenzie, 2002); additionally, students need guidance in the interpersonal components, such as in conducting professional business meetings (Darabi, 2002). Such skills, though discussed in class, must be practiced and refined in the field (Gredler & Johnson, 2001; Trevisan, 2002). Although teachers of evaluation realize that the classroom environment does not necessarily reflect work in the field, this case study demonstrates that students may not understand this fact.

For instance, instructors use terms in classroom discussions to describe concepts and situations witnessed in the field. Darabi (2005) discussed introducing concepts such as "performance gaps" and "performance interventions" to students engaged in applied projects, similar to the nomenclature introduced in the class discussed in the case study. Although Darabi did not discuss how students talked about these concepts with clients, the case study shows that students may use this knowledge very literally when communicating with clients. The facts that evaluation is often connected with employee performance assessments (Kelley & Jones, 1992) and that agency staff members may view evaluation negatively (Taut & Alkin, 2003) may require students to be more sensitive in their descriptions of concepts.

Lessons learned from the student's perspective. It was obvious that the agency director and program coordinator were not comfortable with me looking for holes, gaps, and weakness in their program; it was also apparent that they did appreciate the fact that I would work to "close the gaps and recommend changes to the current strategies." This was indicated by their immediate defensiveness to my project proposal. Although I recognized that the use of these terms was creating tension, I did not know how to describe these concepts in a more sensitive manner.

I would recommend that instructors and students use role-play to practice students' presentations of project and evaluation proposals. It would have been helpful to practice my presentation with classmates test for bias, inappropriateness, and threatening word usage. Several students in the class worked as program coordinators, and they may have provided insight on how agencies may have respond to such a presentation.

Lessons learned from the instructor's perspective. The student's perspective in this challenge is enlightening and ironic. The student notes that the program coordinator became defensive as a result of the student using inappropriate terminology during their interactions. The terms *gaps*, *problems*, and *holes* are, ironically, terms the student repeated from class, when I had explained certain concepts and purposes of evaluation. It has become clear to me that I must be much more sensitive to the vocabulary I use in class. My vocabulary in class is deliberate, designed to make a point and emphasized in a way that students will remember. I have assumed that students process the points I am trying to make, filter the vocabulary, and convey the information in a user- or agency-friendly manner. As evidenced by this case study, this is a dangerous assumption. In the future, I will be much more sensitive to delineating what is appropriate to say in a learning environment from that which is appropriate in an applied setting.

I see that interpersonal communication skills influence the outcome of the student-agency relationship in this course. This makes good sense, given the importance of these competencies in public health practice (Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice, 2001). To increase the likelihood of future student success and to better prepare my students as

public health evaluators, I am considering recommending a prerequisite course in interpersonal communication.

Challenge 5: Project Termination

The challenges presented above and the associated feelings of hostility and resentment threatened to overwhelm the fieldwork experience, and in this case, the project was terminated. Decisions regarding project termination can be complex, but *The Program Evaluation Standards* (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994) give some guidance by stating that "if the confidence and trust of these audiences cannot be secured, the evaluators should seriously consider not proceeding" (p. 31).

Worthen and White (1987) provided some procedures to follow when terminating evaluation contracts. The most important is communication between the evaluator and the client. Prior to any discussions about terminating a project, both parties should be informed that a problem exists. Perceived problems should be discussed in a meeting with all involved parties, and the results of these discussions should be documented. These procedures were used in this case study: several discussions about project dissatisfaction occurred between the student and the agency, a meeting was scheduled to discuss and attempt to resolve problems, and the results of this meeting were documented in an e-mail written by the student.

Lessons learned from the student's perspective. A few weeks into my fieldwork placement, I realized that I was spending less time developing my professional skills and more time in dispute with the agency. The situation was not conducive to either conducting an evaluation or gaining experience from an applied project. The evaluation project was going nowhere, and neither the agency's goals nor mine were being met. Dissatisfaction of the project was being expressed by both parties. It was necessary that a decision be made before the situation became worse: Either the agency and I needed to agree on a resolution, or the project needed to be terminated.

This was a difficult decision to make. I had to weigh several professional and personal issues before deciding to terminate the project. Would my future internship, research, or job opportunities be negatively affected? Would my professional reputation be harmed? Would I be failing both my personal expectations and the course itself? In the end, the deciding point was similar to an ethical standard mentioned by Morris (1990) in his discussion of a fieldwork project gone awry: Even though the agency and the project may not have been appropriate, I felt that I had conducted the fieldwork evaluation project to the best of my ability. This realization made it easier to determine that the project could not be salvaged. I believe that trying to continue the project at this point would have resulted in more harm than good.

Throughout this process, the instructor was very helpful in discussing the issues surrounding project termination. I would make the suggestion to future students to heavily involve their instructors in weighing this decision. Every situation will involve different issues and concerns to address. Instructors may be able to offer valuable insight that will help students make informed decisions and, if necessary, terminate projects in a professional manner.

Lessons learned from the instructor's perspective. From an instructor's perspective, we spend significant time explaining how to foster relationships, build collaborations, and so forth. We tend to pay very little attention to how to terminate a relationship. Even though it sounds like an oxymoron, the successful termination of a relationship is perhaps even more important than successfully forging a new relationship. Failure to end a relationship amicably can have implications on the opportunities for future students to work with the agency and reinforce the nega-

tive reputation of academic evaluators that is held by some members of the community (Wallerstein, 1999). To assist students in understanding how to terminate a project, I will be presenting a series of case studies, including the case presented here, and introducing role-playing activities to assist students in understanding the issues regarding termination and how to conduct ending a relationship.

Summary

Student evaluators may find themselves facing several challenges when entering fieldwork experiences for the first time. As a result of their lack of experience, student evaluators may have difficulties in gaining entry to agencies. Specific attention to preparing for the fieldwork experience (approaching agencies, presenting project proposals, conducting business meetings) is essential for student success. Without addressing potential problems between student evaluators and agencies, fieldwork experiences may be negative, and the termination of projects may result. Of note is that even though the case study presented here had a negative outcome, the fieldwork experience met its purpose of providing the student with the opportunity to learn valuable skills not otherwise possible in a classroom experience. The student had to learn how to manage conflict and terminate a relationship, perhaps some of the most difficult evaluation skills. It is our hope that students and instructors of evaluation can use this article to help students identify problems before they progress to an unmanageable level. Strategies were presented from both a student's and an instructor's perspectives on how to prevent these problems from occurring and how to deal with them as they arise.

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