

GEORGE WARREN  
**BROWN**  
**SCHOOL**

—|| of Social Work ||—

**NEXUS**  
THE PRACTICUM NEWSLETTER

 Washington University in St. Louis

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**Special Pullout**

Evaluations Accessed on Web  
Field Education in the Global Arena

■ Please visit our webpage to see what's happening at the Brown School and for additional resources available for field instructors: [www.gwbweb.wustl.edu](http://www.gwbweb.wustl.edu).

**Core Elements of EBP**

EBP came to national attention in the form of "Evidence Based Medicine" which was first described in the November 4, 1992, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by the Evidence Based Medicine Working Group (EBMWG, 1992). The EBMWG, comprised largely of faculty from McMaster University Medical School in Hamilton, Ontario, described EBP by defining a series of core elements which have been clearly set forth and documented:

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## What's Going on with the Brown School and EBP? (Part 1 of 2)

Brett Drake, Ph.D.

Over the past several years, field instructors, agency administration and the Brown School have worked collaboratively to better understand the challenges that professionals face in approaching problems, questions, and social work practice in an evidence-based manner. The primary goals of this collaborative effort have been: 1) to ensure that Brown School graduates are trained as evidence-based practice (EBP) practitioners, transparent and accountable as they work with individuals, groups and communities in their future practice; and 2) to support the profession and others interested in EBP-based social work in their EBP practice efforts.

### EBP and the Social Worker as Expert

This article will discuss the core concepts our students are taught for finding current evidence, including utilizing the expertise of the systems (e.g., field instructor, client, community, organization, culture, etc.) with whom they're working. One area of serious misunderstanding is that EBP is a set of inflexible commands to do "proven" things. EBP is the process of using best available evidence in conjunction with your judgment, involved persons, and the social context. EBP is not about doing what experts tell you, but it is about understanding what the best information is and applying that information thoughtfully.

## Public Health Focus Expands Brown School

Public health has emerged as an area of focus for the Brown School's long-range strategic plan. To support this effort, Brown School welcomed six new tenured faculty this summer, all with extensive experience in public health. The faculty, many of whom lead nationally recognized public health research centers, were also joined by research professors and center staff. The result? The Brown School added 60 new members to its community.

Learn more about the new faculty's areas of expertise:

**Ross C. Brownson, PhD, Professor.** A leading expert in chronic disease prevention and an expert in the area of applied epidemiology, Brownson has helped define and champion the field of evidence-based public health. Brownson is the co-director of the Prevention Research Center—a major, CDC funded institution that develops approaches to chronic disease prevention in high-risk communities.

**Debra Haire-Joshu PhD, Professor.** Haire-Joshu, a health policy expert, develops interventions to reduce obesity and prevent diabetes, particularly among underserved youth. She

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# What's Going on with the Brown School and EBP? (con't)

- **EBP, a five step process:** (1) Formulate empirically relevant question, (2) Locate best available evidence, (3) Assess quality of best available evidence, (4) Integrate best available evidence with professional judgment and client factors, and (5) Review, both process and outcomes (Sacket et. al, 1996).
- **EBP, a radical departure from prior forms of medical and social service education:** Today individual practitioners have access to good evidence in real time and don't have to rely on precedent or what an authority figure says. First, large numbers of good quality empirical studies have become available in the last 40 years. While all domains of social work knowledge do not benefit from large amounts of high quality evidence, the amount of such evidence in existence can no longer be dismissed. In some areas of social work practice (e.g. treatment of phobias, utilities of actuarial vs. consensus-based risk assessment) the accumulated evidence is very strong. Second, there has been significant development in the growth and availability of search engines in the last thirty years. This has enabled the growing body of evidence to be quickly recovered by practitioners.

These scientific and technological advances make it possible for the individual practitioner to make his or her own decisions based on the best available evidence in real time. This contrasts markedly with "the way of the past" (EBMWG, 1992; p. 2420), where practitioners had no choice but to rely mainly on tradition and opinions of those in authority when making decisions. Also, EBP's focus on the primacy of the individual practitioner is very desirable in MSW education, because the MSW is the terminal practice degree, a prerequisite for licensure, and is geared towards creating social workers who can practice autonomously.

## Five Steps to EBP

We are using the mnemonic "FLAIR" as a way to remember the five steps and core elements of the EBP process mentioned earlier:

1. Formulate an empirically relevant question answerable by data (e.g., "Why do members of X racial group often drop out of treatment?" or "What organizational factors have been shown to most directly influence client outcomes?").

2. Locate the Best Available Evidence.
3. Assess the quality of the evidence you found.
4. Integrate the best available evidence with professional judgment, client factors, and social context.
5. Review how things went. Did you find the information needed? Did you implement a new plan? How did it go?

## Where is the Best Available Evidence Located?

We introduce our students to many resources to begin their search for best evidence:

Practice Guidelines (e.g. guideline.gov)—Repositories of the best available information about how to handle specific issues, usually diagnoses; these are often released by national organizations like the AMA or APA.

Systematic Review—Describes the efficacy of research on specific treatment approaches and are available at several sites, including the Campbell Collaboration and the Cochrane Collaboration.

Original Research Articles—Best sources of data; accessed using Google Scholar or databases like Medline or Psycinfo.

Overview Articles or Meta-Analyses—Overview of many different original articles.

National or Private Sources—Sources accessed online or at a library (e.g., national—OJJDP, Census Bureau; private—Urban Institute; local—St. Louis Community Development Agency website).

## Research Alone Isn't Enough

The following illustration of step 4 in the EBP process might help people remember that EBP is a dynamic process involving (a) the best available evidence with (b) *social worker* judgment and experience, while considering (c) all involved persons (client, parents, other providers, caregivers)



and (d) the social context, including formal factors (laws, agency policies, lack of health care availability) and informal factors (e.g. sexism, culture). Again, research alone does not make an intervention evidence-based. The social worker's judgment and expertise while considering the people and social context are paramount to this process.

In the next issue of *NEXUS* we will describe how the Brown School will be moving forward to bring EBP solidly into the forefront of the School's educational experience and how field instructors will be involved.

## THANK YOU!

Many thanks to all who attended the Fall 2008 Practicum Agency Fair. Fifty-two agencies were represented with over 100 students checking out the variety of opportunities! Supporting the Office of Field Education's efforts to go paperless, the on-line registration process worked very well. We look forward to working with you throughout the year when you're hosting one of our students—and seeing you next year at the Practicum Agency Fair!

# Mentoring: Task Supervision

Many agencies are able to provide students a breadth of learning opportunities that require input and feedback from a number of agency professionals. Although CSWE requires one official field instructor who meets weekly with students to process their experiences, we recognize and value the role of the “task supervisor” as well in our students’ professional development.

With task supervisors, however, often comes the challenge of “serving too many masters.” Students, especially when new to an agency, find it difficult to determine to whom they are supposed to go for feedback, clarification, input, etc., and before they know it, they may quite innocently find themselves in the middle of a triangulated mess!

Cheryl Wingbermuehle, MSW, LCSW, shared with us a system the St. Louis Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association uses to minimize the frustrations students might experience when having multiple supervisors:

- 1) **Identifying an assigned field instructor**—Based on a student’s initial interests and needs, a field instructor with expertise in the area of the student’s interest is assigned to interview student. When a student accepts the practicum, the assigned field instructor is then responsible for taking the lead in developing an orientation plan that includes input from the other agency professionals or “task supervisor(s)” who will be working with the student.
- 2) **Orientation Plan**—The orientation plan is established prior to the student beginning the practicum and sets the tone of open communication between field instructor, task supervisor(s), and student. The orientation planning process provides an opportunity for the staff to identify who is responsible for training on various tasks and to establish a plan for weekly supervision.
- 3) **Educational Learning Agreement (ELA)**—The assigned field instructor reviews the learning agreement with the student and signs it. Often the task supervisor signs as well to make sure everyone involved has reviewed it and knows the expectations. Everyone gets a copy.

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- 4) **Weekly Supervision**—The field instructor meets weekly with student for formal supervision and the task supervisors are available to answer questions and provide direction as needed.
- 5) **Team Meetings**—Prior to the mid-semester site visit (and as needed), all supervisors and the student meet to discuss student’s progress, review ELA, and make sure the student is on track. Efforts are made to schedule the site visit so all supervisors can attend.
- 6) **Evaluations**—The field instructor shares the mid-semester and final evaluations with the other task supervisors and requests input and signatures –again, to ensure everyone involved knows how the student is progressing.
- 7) **Communication**—Although students are empowered to communicate issues and concerns as they arise by reporting them to the field instructor, task supervisor, or volunteer coordinator, the field instructor will use weekly supervision to assess student’s progress and any potential communication challenges or concerns of student. This opens the door for the student to communicate areas of stress or conflict.

If you have any questions regarding how to maximize the student’s experience through tasks and assignments with other agency professionals and supervisors, please feel free to contact the Office of Field Education.

## Public Health Focus Expands Brown School (con’t)

serves as associate director of the Medical School’s Diabetes Research and Prevention Center.

**Matthew W. Kreuter, PhD, Professor.** Professor Kreuter, author of *Tailoring Health Messages*, is a national health communication expert. He is the founder and director of an innovative health communications research laboratory that develops targeted communications strategies to culturally diverse groups with the goal of increasing cancer screenings and other positive health behaviors.

**Douglas A. Luke, PhD, Professor.** A top biostatistician and social science methodologist, Luke has made significant contributions to the evaluation of public health programs, tobacco control and prevention policies, and the application of new methods to community health interventions.

**Timothy McBride, PhD, Professor.** An influential health policy analyst and leading health economist, McBride is shaping the national agenda in rural health care, Medicare policy, health insurance, and access to health care. He was recently appointed the Brown School’s associate dean for public health. In this role, he will lead the effort to establish the Brown School’s Master of Public Health degree program. The program plans to enroll its first class in the fall of 2009.

**Vetta L. Sanders Thompson, PhD, Associate Professor.** Sanders Thompson researches issues of racial identity, psychosocial implications of race and ethnicity in health communications and access to health services, and determinates of health and mental health disparities.

the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The Extension Department & the Coady were formed out of a people's movement during the Depression. Today the Coady's programs serve mid-senior level development leaders from around the world. The focus of the Institute is to strengthen community capacity and provide a space for leaders to come together to share their knowledge for action.

Melanie's field placement proved to be intense and rewarding as she was immersed in new learning about theory and practice in the community context. She was challenged to think globally about the complexity of discrimination and marginalization issues while working with international leaders. An additional part of her practicum involved data analysis and grant-writing which resulted in the funding of a program that addresses key knowledge, skills and attitudes specific to the health sector. The opportunity to participate in this effort was extremely meaningful for Melanie as it allowed her to give back to local communities in her home country in a tangible way.

Melanie hopes that the skills that she has learned, the organizational values and culture that she witnessed and the incredible people that she worked with will leave an indelible impact on the way that she engages in social work practice as she completes her graduate program.

### Fighting Health and Environmental Risks in India

**Students:** Tim Severyn, Elaine Grimm and Devin Peipert

**Agency:** George Warren Brown School of Social Work (Guatam N. Yadama, Ph.D.)

**Location:** Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India

**Type:** Research

Dr. Gautam Yadama, associate professor and Director of International Programs at the Brown School, believes in the importance of the field experience. So this past summer he sent three of his MSW students, Devin Peipert, Elaine Grimm, and Tim Severyn to Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, a small town in southern India to collect data for his research study investigating connections between poverty, energy insecurity, ecological stability, and the adverse health effects incurred by use of traditional biomass cookstoves. Rural, land-dependent households collect fuelwood from local forests to meet their daily needs around cooking, water boiling and heating, which contribute to deforestation. In addition, the smoke emitted from burning fuelwood poses significant health risks to households, particularly women and children.

Tim, Elaine and Devin worked closely with engineering faculty and students from Washington University to develop an interdisciplinary analysis of the social, cultural and economic factors that impact cookstove use to inform the design of improved stoves. The ultimate goal of this project is to make policy and technical recommendations for cookstove programs aimed at reducing the negative health and environmental effects of fuelwood consumption. The project is funded by Washington University's McDonnell Academy Global Energy and Environment Partnership (MAGEEP), the Brown School of Social Work, and the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), an internationally recognized NGO that hosted the students and worked

intimately with them on every aspect of the project—design, logistics, enumeration, etc.

This practicum experience has helped prepare Tim, Elaine and Devin for careers working at the nexus of human development and environmental concerns. This kind of training is increasingly important as it becomes clearer that interventions in the fields of human welfare and ecological conservation must be cooperative, working to remedy problems in both areas at the same time. All students agree that this practicum experience greatly enhanced their classroom learning by providing a reference point to guide further study in international and domestic social and economic development.



Tim Severyn, May '09  
MSW (Community Development & Environment)

Tim—Tim has individualized his concentration to focus upon environmental social work and community development. Working with Dr. Yadama and FES provided him with practical experience in the field, endowing him with a skill set and research tools that can be utilized anywhere on the planet. Even more important to him than these skills, however, was the cultural emersion this sort of fieldwork provided, opening him up to new choices, new opportunities, and an entirely new take on development work. Ultimately, he hopes these experiences can inform his work for environmental justice within the United States, informing both his practice and the theology behind it.

Elaine—Elaine is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPVC) and sought this practicum for its research focus. Embracing the Brown School's commitment to Evidence-Based Practice, Elaine believes that we must challenge our assumptions about what policies will be most effective and sustainable, by consulting solid research. When recommending policy interventions on intertwined environmental and social problems, it is necessary to have an understanding of how human and ecological systems interact. Exposure to the elements of this study provided plenty of practice at navigating the exact kinds of problems Elaine will like to continue to study, ultimately applying to PhD programs in Environmental Policy.



Elaine Grimm, May '09  
MSW (SED)

Devin—Devin's career goals include conducting research on environmental and social issues; thus, this kind of practicum experience provided a wonderful, hands-on opportunity to practice activities he expects to be central to his future. Devin plans to apply to Ph.D. programs in natural resource management, and feels that this practicum was an excellent first look at the kind of work he would like to pursue not only after graduation, but far into his career.



Devin Peipert, May '09  
MSW (SED)

# Field Education in the Global Arena

Each semester students from the Brown School pursue a variety of enriching practica experiences outside the St. Louis area. In this issue of NEXUS we will take you to an ecumenical organization in New York City, over the Canadian border to a community development organization in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and across the world to catch up with a research project led by Gautam N. Yadama, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Director of International Programs at the Brown School, in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India.

## Realizing an Ecumenical Vision in New York

**Student:** Shantha Ready

**Agency:** National Council of the Churches of Christ

**Location:** New York City, NY

**Type:** Community Organizing and Inter-Group Dialogue

As a dual degree candidate with the Eden Theological Seminary Pastoral Studies program, Shantha Ready has bridged her fascination with community organizing and inter-group dialogue with her love of the Church universal

and its mission for social transformation. Shantha is currently doing her concentration practicum with her former Eden professor and mentor Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A (NCC) and worked with religious leaders this summer in New York City, where NCC is located, to develop ecumenical education and prayer materials as well as to organize young adult ecumenists across the country.



Shantha Ready, May '09  
MDiv/MSW (Mental  
Health & SED)

Shantha was drawn to ecumenical ministry when she was an exchange student in Santiago, Chile, and first grasping the liberation theological concept of praxis, the constant cycle of learning, action, and faith reflection. Learning about and engaging with Chilean church communities who resisted military dictatorship and continue to work for economic justice, the Christian faith that was once a quiet, stable backdrop under girding Shantha's life became an essential and vitalizing source of passion and strength. Since then, Shantha has grown to appreciate the importance of the religious voice for social justice in the public arena. After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, she worked for a year as a community organizer with People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) in Coachella, California. Shantha enrolled at Brown and Eden for more training and education.

Shantha's practicum with the NCC will continue throughout the school year as an organizer on the planning team for a national gathering in November called "New Fire: Blazing a Common Trail for the Young Adult Ecumenical Movement." She will also assist the NCC in building capacity for evidence-based practice by conducting an evaluation of their annual general assembly and studying leaders' implementation of their 2007-2011 Strategic Plan for her Master of Pastoral Studies capstone project. Upon graduation, Shantha is eager to continue living her vocation as an agent of Church renewal through the realization of the ecumenical vision.

## Implementing International Leadership Initiatives in Canada

**Student:** Melanie Messer, MSW '08 (SED)

**Agency:** Coady International Institute

**Location:** Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

**Type:** Community Development and Adult Education

After participating in the Brown School's China Institute in the summer of 2007, Melanie Messer returned to her studies inspired by the people she had met who were active in their home countries. The China Institute had catalyzed her thinking and she had begun to contemplate questions related to power, theory, and practice and about the values inherent in professional social work practice in North America. She sought a concentration practicum actively engaged with community members as partners and collaborators that could address some of these questions and was thrilled to learn about



Melanie Messer, MSW  
'08 (SED)

## EVALUATIONS ACCESSED ON WEB

One of the priorities in the Office of Field Education (OFE) this past year has been to begin the transition to becoming a paperless operation. Becoming paperless will positively impact our environment, our budget, and our efficiency.

Many field instructors have already participated in our efforts to depend less on paper (and more on the internet) by processing affiliation documentation electronically, completing surveys regarding practicum openings on Survey Monkey, and sending student paperwork (complete with electronic signatures) via email. Our next step, which we began implementing in the 2007-2008 academic year, was to make all of the evaluation documents available via our external website: <http://gwbweb.wustl.edu>. Here's how the process works:

- 1) When students' Educational Learning Agreements (ELA) are approved, field instructor email addresses are entered into our database.
- 2) Within a week of the ELA deadline, an email is sent to all of the current field instructors with important information (e.g. evaluation deadlines, how to access forms) about being a field instructor.
- 3) Upon accessing the external website, field instructors are instructed to go to "Community Resources," "Field Instructor Resources," and "Key Forms."

Feel free to save these documents (accessed on the external website) so you always have copies available. Should the documents change, we will be sure to notify you and the students.

Thanks for helping us in our efforts to becoming paperless! We greatly appreciate it!

# New Field Site Coordinator Joins the Office of Field Education

Jeffrey Yin, MSW, recently joined the Office of Field Education as Field Site Coordinator. Jeffrey will be responsible for conducting new affiliation site visits, as well as helping to evaluate and provide support to existing field sites and field instructors. Prior to coming to the Brown School, Jeffrey was the Behavior Intervention Program Coordinator at Logos School in St. Louis where he was a member of the school's administrative team. He helped lead the field education program, which attracted graduate students from throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area. Jeffrey also served as a field instructor to Brown School students.

A Brown School alum, Jeffrey's professional interests include drug/alcohol counseling, anger and crisis intervention, and significant work experience with gang-affiliated and incarcerated youth in Missouri and California. He is proud to be back at the Brown School and looks forward to working with students and field instructors helping to ensure enriching and rewarding experiences in the field.

## FIELD EDUCATION CALENDAR

### Fall 2008

#### December

- 12** Final Evaluation of Practicum  
(This date applies to students who have completed all contracted practicum hours.)

### Spring 2009

#### February

- 3** School Social Work Fair (hosted by the Brown School)

- 16** Educational Learning Agreement due

#### March

- 9-13** Spring Break

- 16** Dr. Clara Louise Myers Outstanding Practicum Student Awards—Nominations due  
Shirlee Fink Kahn Award for Volunteerism—Nominations due

- 30** Mid-Semester Evaluation of Practicum Due  
(This date applies to students who are at least mid-way in completing their practicum hours.)

#### May

- 4** Final Evaluation of Practicum  
(This date applies to students who have completed all contracted practicum hours.)



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