



# INTRODUCTION

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## **Transforming Academic Requirement to Social Commitment: The Field Instruction Program in Community Development**

**by Prof. Lenore Polotan dela Cruz**

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"The eternal challenge for development work is to do better."  
Robert Chambers, 1997

Since the 1970s, the Department of Community Development, UP CSWCD offers graduate and undergraduate academic degrees that seek to educate competent community development professionals who are committed to people's empowerment and participation, sustainable development and gender equity. From its humble beginning as a service delivery mechanism of the government in the 1950s, CD as an academic discipline has evolved in response to the dynamic character of social development. The growing concern for popular participation and social equity has brought to fore the need for an integrated strategy of organizational capability building among grassroots organizations as well as concrete community-managed welfare and livelihood programs. Our goal is to help create a society that provides women and men equal access to social, economic, political and cultural opportunities through people's collective actions.

As an academic program, the CD curricula are designed to provide students with praxis-oriented education that allows complementation of theoretical knowledge and practice. It is for this reason that the Field Instruction Program is an integral part of both the undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The Field Instruction Program (also known as the Fieldwork Program) seeks to provide opportunities for students to apply basic CD concepts, principles, approaches and strategies to real-life situations, making the society and particular rural and urban communities the bigger classroom for weaving theory and practice into one coherent package. Fieldwork is seen as an effective vehicle for both learning and service through which students (with the guidance of



faculty supervisors) validate and critique the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom to help communities address real-life issues and problems. Actual field experiences also allow both faculty and students to test out and develop effective strategies for people-centered and gender-responsive projects and services, which in turn enhance classroom teaching.

This volume of the CSWCD Journal features selected experiences of the Field Instruction Program of the Department of Community Development. Written by faculty members who have had significant involvement in the program as FI supervisors, the case studies present and analyze experiences from four different fieldwork placements. The first case study looks at an urban poor community in Taguig, Metro Manila where CD students were involved in organizing mothers/parents to manage a Day Care Center (Paaralang Bayan) and eventually confronted issues of housing and landlessness. The story of peasant communities displaced by the San Roque Dam in Pangasinan province relates the courageous efforts of the communities to protect their livelihoods and environment threatened by a supposedly 'development' project. This is followed by a paper narrating the experience of two disaster-stricken areas in Nueva Ecija and Pampanga and how the communities were mobilized in disaster response. Finally, the last case study gives an account of a pioneering multi stakeholder response to establish a children's welfare delivery system in the province of Bulacan. Although the context is diverse and each experience is distinct, the papers collectively present useful insights on the significant contribution of the fieldwork program to the formation of CD professionals, as well as identify key challenges to the development of CD as an academic discipline and to the field instruction program itself.

## **FIP: Description and Learning Goals**

The BSCD curriculum offered in UP Diliman is a four-year undergraduate course that prepares students for CD practice through participatory development perspectives, community organizing, research, community education, advocacy and project development and management. The MCD program provides advanced training in the following fields - development perspectives, CD practice, research, planning and administration and organizational and human resource development. Field Instruction in the undergraduate level consists of 18 units taken for two semesters during the student's senior year. On the other hand, graduate students are required to enroll in 3-6 units of fieldwork after completing 24 units of coursework.



| <b>COURSE</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>  | <b>STUDENTS'<br/>LEARNING GOALS</b>   |
|---------------|---|---|
| CD 180        | Field Practice I<br>Supervised field practice for developing basic skills in Community Organizing<br><br>(9 units)<br><br>Required number of hours:<br>Minimum of 750 hours of community-based work | *Develop the ability to identify bases of planned intervention being implemented in the placement site through integration, research and community study;<br>*Gain familiarity with the concepts and methods employed in community organizing;<br>*Develop the ability to integrate and generate community participation in CD work;<br>*Develop the ability to critically assess development programs in the community; and<br>*Develop skills in documenting the entire fieldwork experience in the community   |
| CD 181        | Field Practice II<br>Supervised field practice for developing specialized skills in Community Development (9 units)<br><br>Required number of hours:<br>Minimum of 750 hours                        | *Develop the ability to critique and come up with concrete recommendations with regards the implementation of a development project/program in the community;<br>*Develop the ability to conceptualize a program of action or a development intervention in the community within the framework of enhancing people's empowerment;<br>*Develop the ability to facilitate the development of people's knowledge and skills in planning and implementing a short-term project (e.g. feasible within a one-semester period);<br>*Develop the ability to hone organizational development and management skills for community organizations |



| <b>COURSE</b> | <b>DESCRIPTION</b>   | <b>STUDENTS'<br/>LEARNING GOALS</b>   |
|---------------|--|---|
| CD 280        | Field Practice I<br>Supervised field practice in actual community organizing work and/or operations of agencies/organizations engaged in Community Development (3 units)<br><br>Required number of hours:<br>Minimum of 250 hours              | * Develop the students' critical analyses of community realities through direct exposure and reflection;<br>*Refine and apply students' skills in community organizing;<br>*Hone students' ability to develop and evolve their own model of CO  |
| CD 281        | Field Practice II<br>Supervised field practice for students to specialize in particular aspects of direct community work or management & operations of a development agency (3 units)<br><br>Required number of hours:<br>Minimum of 250 hours | * Develop further the students' critical analyses of community realities and/or agency/organization work through exposure to and reflection on community realities;<br>*Apply, test and refine the students' skills in CD planning, administration, supervision and evaluation of development project/program;<br>*Hone the students' skills in synthesizing their ideas/perspectives |

In carrying out the fieldwork program, the Department pursues mutually beneficial partnerships with development agencies/programs and community-based organizations. Through the years, NGOs, people's organizations and research cum community extension programs of the College/University served as field placements for students. For the Department's fieldwork program, these partnerships offered students and faculty tremendous opportunities for learning about complex social realities and for testing out development strategies. On the other hand, partner agencies/organizations benefit from the collaboration through the concrete involvement of stu-



dents and faculty in their development activities whether in the form of research, organizing, project implementation, trainings, resource mobilization, to name a few. More significantly, the partnership often involves dynamic debate, dialogue and negotiation concerning ideas, beliefs, values and perspectives regarding development goals and how best to bring it about in a particular community/context. Hence, embedded in the fieldwork program is the opportunity for everyone - the agency, community members, the faculty and students - to get involved in the process of learning by doing.

## **FI Supervision: Roles and Responsibilities**

Since Field Instruction is a vital part of a CD student's academic preparation, supervision plays a crucial role and occurs at different levels. Essentially, field supervision is understood as the process of providing timely, adequate and relevant guidance and support to students necessary to ensure that the learning goals are achieved. Central to this is the function of the faculty supervisor. His/her key responsibility is to facilitate the student's learning process by providing the appropriate theoretical framework/perspectives with which the students and the agency/organization could analyze their practical experiences. S/he also acts as liaison between the Department and the agency to ensure coherence and alignment of perspectives and planned activities.

Since students are based in the community full-time, the faculty supervisor is required to conduct regular field visits to:

- 1) facilitate team discussions and reflection/synthesis sessions
- 2) provide psycho-social interventions
- 3) observe and assess students' behavior/performance
- 4) trouble shoot 'problematic' situations
- 5) extend assistance in conduct of community activities

The agency supervisor's role is to facilitate smooth integration of the students to the program and/or community so that the students are able to perform everyday tasks assigned to them during the placement. Agency supervisors lead in operational planning, periodic tactic sessions, finding host families, monitoring students' performance and providing other logistical support.

## Building the road while walking...

Community organizing as a core strategy in Community Development is based on the premise that development approaches should build on the inherent capacities and concrete experience of communities. Here, the concept of 'self-agency' is vital - the conceptual understanding of self as an agent capable of shaping motives, behavior and future possibilities. CO facilitates the transformation of communities...

| From Being... | To...                            | Through...                                       |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Divided       | Being United                     | Developing relationships of trust and solidarity |
| Confused      | Sharing Understanding            | Facilitating analysis and shared interpretation  |
| Reactive      | Taking initiative                | Strategizing collective actions                  |
| Passive       | Taking action                    | Motivating and mobilizing                        |
| Adrift        | Having a shared sense of purpose | Accepting responsibility for self and others     |

Community organizing is expected to build and strengthen alternative community institutions, social relationships and structures, programs and systems that promote people empowerment, social equity, and solidarity. The CO process aims to increase the people's capacities to take charge of themselves by enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes and bringing about critical awareness, leadership development and organizational planning and management, among others.

As can be noted from the experiences described in the case studies, students face a variety of challenges once their fieldwork begins. At the personal level, it marks the start of life away from the comforts of home and everyday routine. Living with host families in the communities for two semesters requires tremendous adjustments in lifestyle, worldviews and even personal habits. Students learn and apply basic life skills such as learning the local language, relating with other people and making friends, teamwork, cooking, fetching water and other household chores, etc. Although these may seem simple, personal adjustments to the community's way of life have proven to be vital in the student's formation process.



In addition, students are expected to learn on their feet and perform a variety of roles depending on the nature and stage of the organizing process they find in the communities. Though armed with theoretical knowledge and skills, students discover that theories and concepts are sometimes too abstract and limited by its attempt to simplify what in reality are complex and diverse. Hence, *pakikipamuhay sa komunidad* (integration with the community) is considered fundamental in order to earn people's trust and solidarity. Through integration and analysis, students become more grounded, and incrementally gain deeper understanding of the complex local situation and dynamics.

Undeniably, fieldwork has often been met with frustrations and setbacks. When dealing with complex social realities (politics, culture, environment, economics, etc.) and the increasing unpredictability of the change process itself, students find themselves feeling less capable, and sometimes more confused. Many times, students and faculty could only hope for endurance and patience to survive the frequent disruptive forces that stunt the community's development process (development aggression, patronage politics, internal factionalism within people's organizations, to name a few).

Despite various difficulties, however, the Field Instruction Program has proven to be an innovative way of promoting praxis-oriented learning and committed service among students, faculty and partner communities/agencies. The four case studies provide evidence of different levels of transformations that have occurred as a significant outcome of the program. Students are not simply 'trained' but find fulfillment in being able to witness and accompany people's struggles and achievements. For many students, their fieldwork experience served as a turning point - a defining moment - for deciding to pursue CD not just as a career but also as a profession of committed service.

Partner agencies/communities too benefited from the fieldwork program as students and faculty take on significant tasks such as conducting research, training and capability building, resource mobilization, project planning and implementation, networking and advocacy.

Finally, the four case studies also highlight that from an academic perspective, the Department's field instruction program has also offered its faculty with limitless opportunities for community extension. This integration of field instruction and extension work has allowed the faculty to get involved in conceptualizing, innovating and



testing out program ideas and approaches whether these are in early childhood education, disaster management, peasant organizing, etc., proving that there is an intricate link between knowledge generation and practice. Through the direct engagement of faculty members in community-based projects, they are able to provide technical expertise, influence ideas, beliefs and practices, and advocate for policy changes at the local and national levels. These in turn is translated into new concepts and strategies that nurture the growth of CD as a discipline (e.g., integrating disaster management to the CD framework). Indeed, fieldwork is one of the life sources of effective teaching and instruction.

### ABOUT THE EDITOR



LENORE POLOTAN-DELA CRUZ (Master of Education, 1994, BS Community Development [cum laude], 1980) is Assistant Professor in Community Development at the UP CSWCD. She was Chairperson of the Department of Community Development from November 2001 to October 2004 and Country Representative of Oxfam Great Britain from June 1999 to May 2001.

In her more than two decades as a development professional, she has served as trainer, mentor and consultant to various community-based organizations, NGOs and international development agencies in the Philippines and East Asia. She has written and presented papers and edited books on Community-Based Coastal Resources Management (CBCRM). Aside from CBCRM, her development, participatory research, gender and development, community organizing and education. She sits in the Board of Trustees of the CBCRM Resource Center and the Sentro para sa ikauunlad ng Katutubong Agham at Teknolohiya (SIKAT).