

IFSW European Conference 2017

Marginalization and Social Work in a Changing Society

ABSTRACT

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**Inclusivity vs. Marginalization:
How Students with Disabilities Navigate the Practicum Experience in their Social Work Education**
(15 minute presentation format)

In Canada in the 21st century, approaches to education have changed significantly in terms of offering academic accommodation to students with disabilities. The development of policies, legislation and case law follows from the introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, which enshrined equality rights within the Canadian Constitution. Over the last 30 years, post-secondary institutions, along with Social Work Schools, have also developed policies and protocols to accommodate students with disabilities. Within this context, Schools of Social Work, guided by the Canadian Social Work Code of Ethics and the Canadian Association of Social Work Education Standards for Accreditation, must support a framework for diversity and social justice within their program.

For students with disabilities, nowhere is this a more complex and multi-faceted issue than in the area of practicum/field placement. Students in Accredited Canadian Schools of Social Work are required to complete 700 hours of field placement, usually in two settings, to complete the Bachelor of Social Work degree. For students with disabilities, the field placement is one of the most difficult areas to negotiate and manage within the academic setting. While academic accommodation is provided through on campus services and faculty support, practicum experiences involve placing a student in a social services agency with an agency social worker as the field instructor and a faculty member supporting the student and the agency. The dilemma for Schools of Social Work is how to fully integrate students with disabilities into the signature pedagogy of social work education, the field placement, without further marginalizing students who want to be fully engaged in the practice of social work.

This presentation will explore the challenges and best practices noted within current literature on supporting students with disabilities to be fully integrated into practice settings as emerging social work practitioners rather than marginalized within a disability agency setting that supports students as “client-helpers”. Drawing on social work students’ experiences of marginalization within social work programs, theoretical approaches to disability studies, and extensive experience of the presenters in practice and social work education, this presentation will promote a new understanding about how to integrate students with disabilities into social work profession.

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