

## **Ethical Considerations for International Fieldwork**

### **Preamble:**

The following could be used as discussion points for classes. Questions may trigger and promote conversations and dialogues about content and potential dilemmas.

### **Questions to Ponder by Category:**

#### **Certification considerations**

Will the international experience sufficiently prepare the student for certification?

Should the student's home-country fieldwork assignment be particularly chosen to offer solid certification preparation in order to offset the international experience?

Is the educational program aware that some international experiences are scheduled as optional placements beyond required fieldwork?

#### **Clarity**

Is there advance verification in writing of the type(s) of population, location, duration of placement, credentials of FWE/preceptor, supervision, contact persons, housing, hours, days of work week, days when facility is closed?

Is it clear that there will be no replacement for the student(s) at the end of the agreed upon period of service?

#### **Communication**

Is there clarity about communication availability in the geographical location of the assignment (telephone contact, email)?

How will necessary off-site communication be handled between FWE/preceptor/coordinator and student?

#### **Competence**

Does the student have the professional competencies to serve the population within the supervision that will be made available?

What professional competencies are expected by the site?

Has the educational program provided the course titles, course descriptions and outlines of the occupational therapy courses that the student has completed?

Is cultural competence a required part of the curriculum and/or preparation for an international experience?

## **Cultural aspects**

Have the student and educational program reviewed cultural competencies significant to the population to be served?

Will the student appropriately be able to participate in engagement with staff and clients at the international site?

If a student requests a placement in a culturally different environment than that of the student and the site is willing to accept the student, is it inappropriate to assign the student to work with the population?

If a key goal of international fieldwork is to expose students to varied cultures, should a placement request for assignment to the country of birth be pursued?

Is the student one who will respect the culture of the assigned site?

Can the student demonstrate some advance research/awareness of the cultural norms of the country to be visited?

Is the student willing to abide by the dress code?

Will the student be comfortable among individuals dressed according to the norms of the country?

Are religious differences a concern?

## **Environmental conditions**

Will the student be able to function within the environmental conditions expected to be encountered?

How much detail should be explored regarding insect infestation, drinking water, crime, etc.?

What health services/alerts should the student investigate in advance?

Are there US State Department warnings in place?

## **Financial Issues**

Is it ethically responsible to pursue a potential agreement before assuring that funding will be available to implement it?

Who (student, educational program) is responsible for exploring potential funding sources?

What is the anticipated cost of airfare at the time of the placement? Is Priceline or equivalent an acceptable possibility?

Has the student been referred to the college's Study Abroad office or equivalent?

At what stage should the student be asked how much the student could contribute to the expected expenses?

Have food costs been recognized within the overall package so that the student will not have to decide between eating or paying for a commuter bus?

### **Housing**

While knowledge of the individuals involved must prevail, if the FWE/preceptor offers to have the student stay in the FWE's home for a minimal charge, will the college/educational program consider the possibility?

Are there special needs/special requirements?

What are the merits of the various options when values and morality are considered?

With on-site housing does the student meet the criteria? How many students are assigned per room? Are there mixed genders?

Is public transportation available between the housing site and the clinical service site? How long is the commute? Will there be issues regarding hitching a ride, involving staff in transport concerns, having to cover taxi costs?

Is walking between housing and treatment site feasible, safe according to the standards of the country?

### **Impact on Population and Beyond**

When the student leaves, will there be a replacement possibility to carry on the services provided? Does it matter?

Is providing occupational therapy and then leaving the population without the ability to continue it, doing more harm than good?

Is there the possibility of even brief training of individuals in the community for carry-over, to maximize the value of a one-time intervention?

Will the student's sharing of information about conditions and salaries in the USA, contribute to therapists leaving that country? How can such a potentially negative impact be minimized?

Has the student been referred to such works as, Kronenberg's, *Occupational Therapy Without Borders*, to enhance use of professional nomenclature and awareness of social justice issues, such as apartheid?

### **Language**

What are the language requirements of the site?

Is the student prepared to engage in language training, if required, in advance of assignment to be sufficiently proficient by the starting date?

If the student is not proficient in the language of the country, but is proficient in the language of a large proportion of the population served, and is therefore acceptable to the site, is there any reason not to proceed with the placement?

Will the language of supervision be able to be understood by both the student and the FWE/preceptor?

Does the student/educational program recognize the value (cognitive/connections) of being exposed to a new language?

### **Legal Considerations**

Is the student someone who is likely to raise concerns about rights that may only apply/need to be posted in the home country?

Is the student aware that legal standards of the home-country may not apply in the country to which the student is to be assigned?

Does the student know that the penalties in the assigned country for such violations as drug use, may be much more severe than in the home-country?

Is the student sufficiently astute /informed to realize that practice carried out in the assigned country may be well beyond the scope of practice and supervision requirements of the state to which the student will return?

### **Liability**

Is the country considered a litigious society?

Does the student's liability insurance cover an international experience?

Is the student registered in the educational institution while outside of the country of enrollment?

Does the agency provide liability coverage for students?

### **Respect**

Does the student already demonstrate respect for people from different ethnic backgrounds, for those of different ages and abilities?

Is the student ready to respect the norms of the country and the policies of the receiving agency?

### **Safety of Student, fieldwork site, country**

Does the student have the self sufficiency and emotional maturity needed to negotiate situations that might be encountered?

Has the student been prepared to "expect the unexpected?"

Is the receiving agency aware that the student may be out of comfort level in the new setting?

Is the student one who might engage in more risky behaviors in the anticipated environment?

Is the agency location within the country one of relative calm?

What procedures are in place regarding crime, terrorism, disaster planning?

### **Valuing differences**

Is the student prepared to make diversity an advantage?

Is the student eager for the learning experience of a different environment, different people, different equipment, different treatment approaches, and more?

Has the student read some of the OT related articles regarding international experiences?