GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

Learning Contracts

The learning contract is a plan for achieving specific learning objectives during the year. It should show how the learning from your course work will be applied to the organizational setting. It should also identify any new competencies that will be acquired during the experience. Once the contract has been approved by the advisor, you should gain greater clarity about what you know and how you approach your responsibilities. Ideally that clarity leads to improved performance and new or revised learning objectives for future situations.

The learning contract, like any planning tool, should specify desired objectives, methods for achieving those objectives and the methods for evaluating the extent to which the objectives have been achieved. The learning contract should include the following components:

**Goal(s)**

The contract should begin with a general statement of professional goals. It should answer such questions as: why this position was chosen; how it meets intended career goals; and how it will make a contribution to positive social change. The professional goal statement sets a tone and general direction for the learning contract. No methods or evaluation statements are required for the professional goal statement.

**Learning Objectives**

The contract should include a variety of learning objectives, which identify the specific knowledge, skills or self-awareness that a student plans to gain. The number of learning objectives is varied but should include a knowledge, skill, ability and behavior. Suggested sources for objectives include the following:

- On-campus goals and self-assessments. These activities may have helped identify strengths and weaknesses relative to professional goals while on-campus. How can your position be used as an opportunity to build on strengths and to improve weaker areas?

- Opportunities offered by the student organization. What are the organizational responsibilities, and what competencies can be developed through performing them? Also, what can be observed in the organization: what is the organizational structure and leadership style? What are the leading issues this organization addresses, and how does this organization respond to them?

- Opportunities offered by organization location. What knowledge or cross-cultural skills can be developed that might relate to the state or region of the organization, language used, etc.

**Learning Methods (Ways of Doing It)**

Each learning objective should be accompanied by a plan that states the methods by which that objective will be pursued. If the objective is to acquire knowledge, the plan may include observation, consultation with other staff, research or reading. If the objective is to develop a skill, the plan should specify the tasks to be performed, perhaps training to be attended, and feedback on one’s performance. If the objective is to enhance self-awareness, self-observations might be recorded in a personal journal. These are only suggestions to help you get started; there may be other methods. One that should not be overlooked is that of referring to class notes, materials and texts from your courses.
Evaluation Statements

First, specific outcomes that would indicate the successful achievement of the learning objective should be stated. Second, it should be explained how the learning outcome will be demonstrated.

- **Outcomes (Show It):** You should try to think through how they will have changed by the end of the period and how the changes might demonstrate the successful accomplishment of your objectives. Knowledge might be successfully achieved when you are able to successfully write a report or give a presentation. Skills might be successfully developed when you are able to perform specific tasks to your satisfaction and with positive feedback from others involved. Self-awareness could be seen to have increased through the ability to practice appropriate cultural habits. Again, these are only suggestions intended to help as you consider the possibilities.

- **Demonstration in Written Review (Prove It):** Assuming that you have seen for yourself the successful achievement of your learning objectives, how will you convey that learning or give evidence that this learning was achieved? Knowledge may be demonstrated by identifying, explaining and analyzing the relevant issues or subjects. Skills may be demonstrated by assessing personal strengths and weaknesses, using relevant feedback. Self-awareness may be demonstrated by describing and analyzing personal changes experienced. Enclosing products created during the practicum is helpful when they are directly relevant and succinct.

Criteria for Evaluation of Learning Contracts

1. The professional goal statement: does it explain why the student has chosen the learning objectives and how it will contribute to his or her development?
2. The learning objectives, methods and evaluation of learning: do they follow the stated guidelines?
3. The scope of the learning contract: does the contract as a whole include a variety of challenging learning objectives?
4. Writing and presentation: is the contract clearly written and of professional quality?

Potential Topics

- Attitude
- Citizenship
- Communication
- Conflict mediation
- Critical Thinking
- Dealing with Change
- Decision Making
- Delegation
- Diversity
- Effective Feedback
- Effective Meetings
- Ethical Leadership
- Facilitation Skills
- Financial Responsibility
- Goal Setting
- Initiative
- Membership Selection
- Mentoring/Empowering Others
- Positivity
- Problem Solving
- Project Management
- Public Speaking
- Responsibility
- Risk Management
- Self-Awareness/Self-Esteem
- Servant Leadership
- Social Justice
- Stress Management
- Study Skills
- Time Management
- Teams and Groups