PRACTICAL TRAINING OF HUMAN SERVICES SPECIALISTS IN THE USA

ABSTRACT
The article deals with the analysis on the peculiarities of practical training of human services specialists in the USA. It shows that practical training of human services specialists in the USA is of proactive nature and follows the principles of the human services at various levels. Such training prepares future specialists to implement different economic, financial and organizational techniques to support socially vulnerable groups and individual citizens. The article specifies that the human services sector in the USA aims to meet human needs through an interdisciplinary approach to acquiring knowledge, prevent and mitigate the existing problems and enhance the quality of life in general. Besides, it claims that the US human services sector has evolved into a wide network of programmes and agencies that provide an array of services and has promoted effective preparation of human services specialists by means of internships, fieldwork. It clarifies that an internship is understood as a form of experiential learning integrating both the knowledge and theory mastered during the educational process. In this context, an internship is viewed as one of the most efficient ways to prepare students for a career in human services. The article proves that the structure of internships varies among academic programmes in human services. Still, it shows that the most common of them are early internships (along with other related academic courses), internships after completing traditional academic courses on human services and at-the-end-of-degree internships. In the USA, human services students are offered a wide range of internships and fieldwork experience which can boost their motivation towards professional activities and encourage to engage in continuing professional development. Thus, the article concludes that practical training of prospective human specialists in the USA meets all the requirements of today and serves as an integrative experience in the context of field experience in human services. Further research should aim to study the characteristics of research activities of prospective specialists in the human services sector in the US environment.

Keywords: human services, internship, fieldwork, field experience, practical training, the USA, human services specialist.

АНОТАЦІЯ
У статті проаналізовано особливості практичної підготовки фахівців з соціального забезпечення у Сполучених Штатах Америки. Зазначено, що практична підготовка с фахівців з соціального забезпечення у США носить інноваційний характер і відповідає всім принципам надання соціальних послуг на різних рівнях. Така підготовка готова майбутніх фахівців до впровадження різних економічних, фінансових та організаційних методів підтримки соціально вразливих груп та окремих громадян. У статті вказано, що сектор соціальних забезпечення у США прагне задовольняти потреби людини за допомогою міждисциплінарного підходу до здобуття знань.
Інтеграція та використання існуючих проблем та підвищення якості життя в цілому. Крім того, визначено, що американський сектор соціального забезпечення охоплює широку мережу програм та агентств, що надають різноманітні послуги, та сприяє ефективній підготовці фахівців з соціального забезпечення шляхом стажування та виробничої практики. Пояснюється, що під стажуванням розуміють форму експериментального навчання, яке інтегрує знання і теорію, засвоєні під час освітнього процесу. У цьому контексті стажування розглядається як один із найефективніших способів підготовки студентів до кар'єри у сфері соціального забезпечення. Доведено, що структура стажування різиться залежно від академічних програм у сфері соціального забезпечення. Зазначено, що найпоширенішими з них є ранне стажування (поряд з іншими супутніми академічними курсами), стажування після опанування традиційних академічних дисциплін з соціального забезпечення та стажування на старших курсах. У США студентам пропонується широкий спектр стажувань та виробничої практики, які дозволяють підвищити їхню мотивацію до майбутньої професійної діяльності та спонукати до подальшого професійного розвитку. Таким чином, зроблено висновок про те, що практична підготовка майбутніх фахівців з соціального забезпечення у США відповідає усім сучасним вимогам і служить інтегративним досвідом у контексті практичної підготовки у сфері соціального забезпечення. Подальші наукові розвідки повинні бути спрямовані на вивчення особливостей дослідницької діяльності майбутніх фахівців з соціального забезпечення у практиці університетів США.

Ключові слова: послуги для населення, стажування, виробнича практика, виробничий досвід, практична підготовка, США, фахівець з соціальної реабілітації.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the system of human services in Ukraine is in the process of change: searching for an optimal structure; shaping basic functions and leading activities at various levels; implementing economic, financial, organizational and technical tools and levers to support socially vulnerable groups and individual citizens. Besides, the principles of the human services system rely not only on Ukrainian legislative acts but also on the international legal obligations of the country. Ukraine is a party to several fundamental international agreements in the field of social human rights. In this aspect, the implementation of norms of international law in national legislation, as well the application of the provisions of ratified international legal acts as norms of direct action require utmost attention. However, it is the solution of these problems that determines Ukraine’s full transition to the effective model of developing the system of human services.

According to the National Organization for Human Services (2020) in the USA, the rather broadly defined field of human services fulfils such important objectives as meeting human needs through an interdisciplinary approach to acquiring knowledge, preventing and remediating the existing problems and enhancing the quality of life. The human services profession promotes and improves service delivery systems since it addresses the quality of direct services and aims to cultivate coordination, responsibility and accessibility among relevant specialists and agencies.

The human services profession will be needed as long as society exists and is a response to modern societal challenges. Thus, the relevance of practical training in human services is difficult to overestimate. It helps students to combine academic work and real professional experience, reflect on their professional development and become competent and successful human services specialists.
Therefore, one should pay particular attention to practical training (internships, fieldwork) of human services specialists, especially in the USA, since the systematic training of human services specialists in this country dates back to 1897. Thus, the US practice of preparing such specialists does accumulate some powerful insights. They should be considered when organizing and realizing practical training of human services specialists in Ukraine.

**THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

The article aims to analyze the peculiarities of practical training of human services specialists in the USA.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS**

Over the years, human services in the USA have evolved into a network of programmes and agencies that provide an array of services. The one feature shared by all of these services is that they are designed to meet human needs (Burger, 2008, p. 2).

One can find many definitions of the term “internship” in scientific literature. Given that internships are included in almost every field of study, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2011) views an internship as “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting”. Thus, this definition proves that internships help students make connections between the workplace and learning in the classroom by exploring their professional field of interest.

The Council for Standards in Human Service Education and Training (2013) considers the integration between theory of practice to be central to the internship experience. It uses such terms as “internships” and “fieldwork” as synonyms. As stated by the National Standards for Human Service Worker Education and Training, “field experience can be described as “an environment and content to integrate the knowledge, theory, skills and professional behaviours that are concurrently being taught in the classroom. It must be an integral part of the education process (Council for Standards in Human Service Education and Training, 2013, p. 10).

Kiser (2015), too, claims that one of the most efficient ways to prepare students for a career in human services is fieldwork. The latter implies engaging in daily work of human service agencies. It is important to note that field experiences are considered the most important and professionally valuable aspect of human services degree programmes.

At the same time, the structure of fieldwork component may vary among degree programmes in human services in terms of duration and modes. Still, the following fieldwork components of such programmes are the most common:

1) an early start of fieldwork, which takes places along with other related academic courses (mostly referred to as “field practicum” or “service-learning project”);
2) the prerequisite for engaging in fieldwork is completing traditional academic courses on human services (it is necessary to teach students to apply their previous theoretical knowledge in fieldwork and thus understand the specifics of a career in human services better);
3) fieldwork (often referred to as “internship) at the end of degree programmes (in such a way, students can apply and test their available knowledge, abilities and skills and acquire new ones) (Kiser, 2015, p. xxi).

Woodside (2016) believes that a field-based experience in human services acts as a powerful learning tool. First, it is a time when students have the opportunity to use their academic knowledge under real-life working conditions. Second, it is also a time when they can recognize themselves as human services specialists and confirm their professional identity (Woodside, 2016, p. xxi).
The National Organization for Human Services (2020) defines the statements most relevant human services internships. They are the following:

1) understanding the nature of human systems: individual, group, organization, community and society, and their major interactions;
2) understanding the conditions which promote or limit optimal functioning and classes of deviations from desired functioning in the major human systems;
3) skills in identifying selecting interventions which promote growth and goal attainment;
4) skills in planning, implementing and evaluating interventions;
5) consistent behaviour in selecting interventions which are congruent with the values of one’s self, clients, the employing organization and the human services profession;
6) process skills which are required to plan and implement services.

Kiser (2015) suggests that making use of knowledge, rather than possessing it, is the biggest challenge for students in the context of field experience in human services. Indeed, the field component is the core of the educational process and serves as an integrative experience.

It must be noted that internships impose on students certain responsibilities to their educational institution and their placement site, which is the location of the internship experience (Woodside, 2016).

Still, the most important feature of internship as a process is not the arrangements or modes, but the quality of reflection and application of the previously acquired knowledge, abilities and skills, as well as other forms of critical thinking incorporated in the internship experience (Kiser, 2015).

Given the above-mentioned aspects, research methods involve analysis and synthesis, generalization and systematization.

RESULTS
In the USA, prospective specialists in human services are offered a wide range of internships and fieldwork experience which can boost their motivation towards professional activities and encourage to engage in continuing professional development.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services offers (2019) organizes student academic internship programme (SAIP). This programme covers different areas of activities of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and aims to develop professionally important legal and professional skills in students. OCR provides students with an access to human services with the help of public education, policy development, investigations, voluntary compliance efforts, enforcement and technical assistance. Besides, it teaches students to protect health information and promotes the compliance with federal laws, thus protecting conscience and prohibiting coercion.

It is important to note that prospective specialists in human services are familiarized with various activities of Civil Right Division. They have the opportunity to acquire diverse experience in civil rights by working on different legal and policy matters which are of paramount importance. They are entitled to consider federal legislative proposals, take part in investigations on complaints, give written recommendations and work on special projects with senior staff. In such a way, students consolidate their knowledge of civil rights, develop their legal research, analysis and writing skills and become ready to prioritize several projects simultaneously.

Importantly, all participants in the programme can be offered to work at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The programme is available both full-time
Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFC) (USA) (2020) offers a wide range of projects within Health and Human Services Department (HHS), including “Help Define the Future of IT at HHS”, “Communication Intern for the Heartland”, “Putting the Human in Health and Human Services”, “Covid-19 Project Manager”. Given the current health-related crisis all over the world, the author of the article believes it necessary to focus on the latter.

Thus, this internship is of great relevance now since the pandemic negatively affects many sectors, such as education, labour, commerce, and, especially the human services sector. It is organized by the the Administration for Children and Families, which is part of the Department of Health & Human Services (Region 10 – Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and 272 federally recognized tribes within those states). Interns are supposed to work together with emergency management specialists and regional administrators on all the Covid-19-related issues. It must be noted that this internship is mainly aimed at managing the partnership between federal agencies in terms of identifying, mitigating and preventing the impact of Covid-19 on human services in the mentioned states. Therefore, students are to take part in weekly meetings, take notes of all the discussions and suggested measures and also develop effective strategies, interact with federal partners and report to regional and national emergency management bodies (Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFC), 2020). Besides, they can represent the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at these meetings, inform about the updates in the programmes proposed by the ACF and implement them in regions. Importantly, they have the opportunity to develop various communication programmes for regional leadership. Those students who wish to pursue such an internship are required to have well-developed data analysis skills, economic analysis skills, editing and proofreading skills, research and writing skills.

It is important to note that electronic portfolios play an essential role in professional development of prospective specialists in human services. Indeed, they serve as tools which enable students to document and reflect on their achievements. Archiving one’s learning experiences is a crucial part of the educational process since it becomes a product of learning which can be assessed by peers and teachers and, most importantly, prospective employers. Some universities require students to prepare such portfolios so that the faculty can assess their progress, give feedback and motivate them to reflect on their learning (Kiser, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, practical training of human services specialists in the USA is of proactive nature and follows the principles of the human services at various levels. It teaches future specialists to be able to implement different economic, financial and organizational techniques to support socially vulnerable groups and individual citizens. In the USA, the human services sector aims to meet human needs through an interdisciplinary approach to acquiring knowledge, prevent and mitigate the existing problems and enhance the quality of life in general.

Besides, the US human services sector has evolved into a wide network of programmes and agencies that provide an array of services and has promoted effective preparation of human services specialists by means of internships, fieldwork. It must be noted that an internship is understood as a form of experiential learning integrating both the knowledge and theory mastered during the educational process. In this context, it is viewed as one of the most efficient ways to prepare students for a career in human services. The
structure of internships varies among academic programmes in human services. Still, the most common of them are early internships (along with other related academic courses), internships after completing traditional academic courses on human services and at-the-end-of-degree internships. In the USA, human services students are offered a wide range of internships and fieldwork experience which can boost their motivation towards professional activities and encourage to engage in continuing professional development.

Thus, one can conclude that practical training of prospective human specialists in the USA meets all the requirements of today and serves as an integrative experience in the context of field experience in human services.

Further research should aim to study the characteristics of research activities of prospective specialists in the human services sector in the US practice.

REFERENCES