

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began in 2009 when Karen Gray invited Terry Wolfer to the University of Oklahoma to share his knowledge about case writing and teaching. Karen had worked with Terry on cases previously and invited him to Oklahoma to mentor faculty in case writing. He met with the instructors of Oklahoma's integrative seminar course, which uses the case method of teaching, and Lori Franklin soon joined their writing collaborative. Together, we decided to compile a collection of cases from multiple areas of practice for instructors to utilize in capstone courses, integrative seminars, and elsewhere across the curriculum.

Lori subsequently received a Faculty Enrichment Grant from the University of Oklahoma, which supported travel and supplies for interviewing practitioners for cases. In addition to this financial support from the University of Oklahoma, we also received support from faculty members at the University of Texas at Austin. Texas faculty members Noël Busch-Armendariz and Dawnovise Fowler were a part of the Oklahoma workshop and have contributed a case. Noël later invited us to Texas for an additional case-writing workshop in 2011. In these and

other ways, the Universities of South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas have supported this case-writing project.

The cases in this collection are based on field research with professional social workers. Although these workers must remain anonymous, we are deeply grateful for their time and effort in giving interviews and reviewing case drafts and for their openness with us throughout the writing process. The interviews required that they recall and reflect upon situations they often found personally challenging, even disturbing. They were not always proud of or pleased with their responses in the situations reported but nevertheless persisted in sharing their experiences for the benefit of students. Without endorsing all their perceptions or responses, we consistently found these social workers to be caring, competent, and ethical practitioners. If they were otherwise, their cases would be less compelling. The case collection would obviously not be possible without these professionals and their deeply personal contributions.

We found most cases by asking experienced social workers about memorable dilemmas they had experienced in professional practice. In a few instances, professionals familiar with decision cases volunteered to report cases when they learned about the project. We sought cases from a variety of professional settings because we wished to provide a curriculum resource broadly applicable to social work education. For the same reason, we sought cases portraying a variety of intervention levels, including direct practice with individuals, families, or groups and practice supervision. As a result, particular cases can be used across the social work direct-practice curriculum.

We researched and wrote the cases using a highly collaborative process developed by a friend and colleague, Mike Welsh. It involved small case-writing teams led by the authors. Teams typically met for initial reporting sessions lasting 90 to 120 minutes. The case-writing process consisted of five steps. First, the case reporter prepared a brief written account of a problem or dilemma he or she actually faced in social work practice. Second, during the initial reporting session, the case reporter told the story in detail. Other team members asked questions to elicit information about the situation on multiple levels (e.g., intrapersonal dynamics, interpersonal and social relations, organizational factors, policy issues). These reporting sessions were

audio recorded to collect detailed descriptions and verbatim dialogue. Third, immediately after the initial reporting session, a case writer prepared a working draft of the case that included a title, introductory “hook,” basic narrative, and a dilemma-posing ending. Fourth, at a subsequent team meeting or via email, the case writer distributed the working draft to other members of the team. At this point, the team members asked further questions of the case reporter to correct, clarify, or amplify the case. Fifth, the case writer used the additional information that emerged from this discussion to revise the case. In addition, analysis from the follow-up discussion was used to prepare teaching notes for the completed case. This writing process promoted in-depth collaboration with experienced practitioners from a variety of social service settings.

The cases are carefully disguised to protect the confidentiality of the case reporters, clients, the case reporter’s coworkers, and the organizations in which the cases occurred. For example, cases may be placed in other states and in organizations with fictitious names, and, of course, all names have been changed. However, in order to maintain the integrity of the cases and portray the issues and dynamics as accurately as possible, we tried to retain details such as people’s ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, personal histories, and other characteristics that affected their interactions—keeping these details either unchanged or very close to the actual situation. Similarly, we tried to retain organizational and community characteristics.

Because some of the cases were coauthored, a bit of explanation about this process is in order. Some of the coauthors were our students or former students, and several were faculty colleagues. For everyone, Terry provided formal instruction or at least written guidelines and informal guidance for writing decision cases and teaching notes. More than other forms of academic writing, decision cases require an unusual combination of technical expertise and familiarity with practice settings. Details matter. Sometimes, for example, a decision turns on a seemingly minor fact, a matter of timing, or an overlooked policy. For that reason, it was important to collaborate with practitioners in this project.

Several master’s in social work (MSW) students and graduates assisted with the research and writing. At Oklahoma, we thank former

MSW students Michelle Hovis and Danielle R. Snyder, who coauthored cases in this collection. As an MSW graduate assistant, Rachel Read contributed to research for teaching notes. At South Carolina, we thank MSW graduate assistants Laura B. Poindexter, Gecole Harley, Sean Siberio, Joe Kunkel, Brenna Healy, Farrah Willett, and Young-seong Seo, who assisted Terry with writing cases and teaching notes and with research for the teaching notes.

After completing a draft of each case and the accompanying teaching note, we solicited a review by an expert consultant familiar with the particular field of practice in which the case took place. For serving as case reviewers, we thank Amy Donaldson (Muscogee Creek Nation, Sapulpa, Oklahoma), Robin Smith (University of Texas at Austin), Jo Ann Regan (Council on Social Work Education), Linda Smith (University of Oklahoma), Mary Brandt (University of Oklahoma), Kathy Moxley (University of Oklahoma), Frank Addonizio (B & D Behavioral Health Services, Durham, North Carolina), Brett Brown (University of South Carolina), Miriam Johnson (University of South Carolina), and Lynn McMillan (Children's Advocacy Center, Spartanburg, South Carolina).

Collaboration with case reporters, coauthors, graduate assistants, expert consultants, and external reviewers helped to ensure the veracity and readability of the cases and the thoroughness of the teaching notes. We and others have already piloted many of these cases—in MSW capstone courses—and we used those experiences with discussants to refine the cases and teaching notes as well. Nevertheless, we cannot guarantee the absence of substantive errors but trust they are minor as a result of these multiple forms of collaboration and review.

Finally, we thank several people connected with Columbia University Press. Executive editors Lauren Dockett and Jennifer Perillo and editorial assistant Stephen Wesley guided the prospectus through multiple levels of internal review; two anonymous external reviewers helped us clarify and elaborate the project; and copyeditor Annie Barva corrected and clarified our writing at many points.

We hope these cases will stimulate and intrigue you. More important, we hope they will provoke significant learning and growth, better preparing you for professional practice.

## TO INSTRUCTORS

*Terry A. Wolfer*

As explained in “Introduction to the Cases,” the decision cases in this collection differ from the cases commonly used in social work education. No matter what your experience with case method teaching or professional social work practice, you will probably appreciate the extensive teaching notes written for each of the cases. These notes are available for instructors at the Columbia University Press website (<http://www.cup.columbia.edu/wolfer-teaching-notes>) or by emailing [instructors@columbiauniversitypress.com](mailto:instructors@columbiauniversitypress.com).

The teaching notes have two basic purposes: first, to help you select particular cases for class use and, second, to help you prepare to lead class discussions about those cases. To help select a case, each teaching note begins with a case synopsis, intended case use, and possible learning outcomes. To prepare for class discussion, each teaching note provides possible discussion questions and responses. These questions and responses are organized into four sequential categories: facts, analysis, action, and personal reflection. Next, the note includes suggestions regarding possible activities—for use before, during, or after