
Generalist (year 1) MSW Practicum FAQs

Q: I keep seeing this term. What is a “Generalist” student?

A: A generalist student is a student in their first year of practicum.

Q: What is the purpose of field education?

A: Field education is an integral part of the social work curriculum and is considered its signature pedagogy. The field education component is facilitated under the direction and supervision of a ***field instructor***. The field instructor is an agency-based licensed social worker or other mental health professional with practice experience who has been vetted and approved by the College of Social Work to provide field instruction. Field education is an opportunity for students to integrate and apply theories they learn in classroom with actual practice with individuals, families, groups, and larger systems. This will develop the skills necessary to competently intervene at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Q: Are practicum internships paid?

A: No, while some agencies may provide financial support, most will not. **Here is why:** Field practicum is a class. As with any other class for which you pay tuition, the goal is to provide you with a valuable learning experience. However, unlike other classes, the focus is on applied social work practice and integration.

This is often confusing for students because it seems like "work" to go to an agency and provide services. Some students refer to this as “non-socially just”, “contrary to social work values”, “exploitive” or “free labor” However, field practicum internships are strictly differentiated from "work" and they meet fair labor standards (FLSA) thought its educational focus, monitoring, supervision, reporting requirements and structure.

Practicum activities and student roles are separate and distinct from "employment," which is why most agencies will not provide a “stipend,” For more information regarding federal internship standards please review the following: [U.S. Department](#)

[of Labor Wage and Hour Division, Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act.](#) Our social work accrediting body, CSWE, has also released a statement regarding stipends that can be provided upon request.

In summary, it is best to assume that your practicum agency will not offer a stipend and to budget your timing and financial resources accordingly. If you have financial concerns, please reach out to the [University of Utah Office of Financial Aid](#)

Q: I interviewed with an agency during another College's practicum fair but then decided to accept admission at the University of Utah. Can I still be placed in this agency?

A: Unfortunately, no. Our practicum placement process is a completely new, different and independent process. We encourage you to list your favorite agencies at the top of your agency preference list but we cannot make any guarantees of placement in an agency you communicated with previously. Also, per policy, we do not permit students to reach out independently to agencies outside of the placement process.

Q: How is my practicum placement determined?

A: Students will complete and submit a field application. Students will complete this application and submit it, with an updated resume to their assigned ***faculty field liaison***. The [faculty field liaison](#) (or field liaison for short) is a College of Social Work faculty member or instructor who has extensive social work practice experience. Generalist students are required to meet with their faculty field liaison in a group format in the first two weeks of March (unless a request is made via email to meet privately). Students are expected to adhere to the placement procedures as outlined in the Policy Handbook and cannot secure placements outside of this process.

MSW Online Students who reside outside of Utah or in an area without approved agency placements, are asked to assist in locating an agency with assistance from your faculty field liaison. However, faculty field liaisons will support students throughout the process.

Q: I am totally new to this situation! What should I expect?

A: All students will receive an email to their UMAIL (or your personal email if you are not a current University of Utah student) providing information about the placements process and providing the name and contact information for the faculty who will support you during your field placement experience. This individual will reach out to you regarding the group information session. You will also need to complete the Practicum Application and submit your resume to your faculty field liaison. The application is located on the Canvas page. On this application, you will

list your top agency preferences, or the agencies you are considering if you are an out of state online student.

Q: Is placement in one of my top ten agencies guaranteed?

A: While every effort is made to place students in one of their top ten agency selections, it cannot be guaranteed. However, faculty field liaisons will work diligently to align students interests with placements.

Q: I am in the Evening MSW program, am I guaranteed placement in an agency that will work with my schedule?

A: Students in the Evening MSW program will be prioritized for placement in agencies that can provide evening and weekend hours, and every effort will be made to accommodate students with this requirement. However, agencies providing evening and weekend hours are limited, and change year to year, so as indicated in the program information provided to students during and after the admission process, placement in an agency with evening and weekend hours *cannot be guaranteed*.

Q: What do I do after I receive the email with information about the agency I have been matched with?

A: After students receive an email from the Office of Field Education with information regarding the agency to which they are referred for placement, (on or around the middle of March) they are required to contact that agency to request a pre-placement interview. Some agencies are agreeable to phone or virtual interviews for students who are unable to interview in person due to geographical distance or national health emergencies. Students should consider this a professional interview: dress appropriately, bring an updated resume and be prepared to discuss, and ask appropriate questions.

Contact with agencies should happen within 7 days of receiving the agency referral from the Office of Field Education.

Q: Can I arrange my own field placement?

A: No. It is the policy of the College of Social Work that all referrals of students must be made by the Field Education staff. Of course, MSW online students living outside of Utah, or in areas without placements will work collaboratively with their faculty field liaison to identify a suitable placement in the area in which they reside.

It should be noted that students may suggest to their faculty field liaison a potential agency, but may not pursue a placement on their own. For detailed instructions on obtaining a field placement, please refer to the BSW and MSW Field Manuals.

Q: *I am already employed at a social work agency. Can I do my field placement there?*

A: Students who are interested in completing an employment-based field placement must complete a separate application and get prior approval from the Office of Field Education. Students who are proposing to use their place of employment as their field site must follow the procedures outlined in the Employment Based Field Placement Policy, in the application and in the MSW Policy Handbook. While students can propose an internship in the agency in which they are employed, they cannot count any hours in their employment capacity as internship hours. The work and schedule must be strictly differentiated.

Q: *Can I change my placement after I have already started?*

A: Students cannot resign from a field placement. Any change in placement requires the involvement of, and approval from the Office of Field Education and is permitted only in extreme circumstances.

Q: *When does my MSW field placement begin and end?*

A: Concurrent (fall and spring) field placements typically begin the first week of classes in the fall and end on the last day of classes in the spring. Summer block placements begin the first week of classes and end the last week of classes.

Q: *Can I begin my field placement before the beginning of the semester-perhaps in the summer?*

A: There are circumstances that may require a student to complete some hours in the semester prior to officially enrolling in field. Students are allowed to complete up to 50 hours in advance for things such as orientation, onboarding, trainings, shadowing and observing. *However, due to University liability restrictions, students are not permitted to provide any direct services to clients during this period.*

Q: *If I exceed my hours, can I discontinue my placement early?*

A: No, students are expected to attend practicum for the duration of the contracted period. Any exceptional and extenuating circumstances that might disrupt this schedule must be discussed well in advance with the field instructor and faculty field liaison

Q: *Can I do my field placement with all evening and/or weekend hours?*

A: It is expected that the majority of placement time will be completed during regular business hours, although arrangements for some placement hours on weekends and evenings may be possible as long as a supervisor is available.

Q: *Can I complete my placement during the summer?*

A: There are a limited number of summer block placements available. However, a full-time PLUS commitment is required, so this option must be carefully considered.

Q: *What happens during school breaks/snow days and other holidays?*

A: The academic calendar lists the holidays and school vacation days during which students are not required to be in field placement. However, any extended breaks such as winter breaks must be discussed well in advance with the field instructor to ensure continuity of client care.

Q: *How do I document my field hours?*

A: Students document field hours in IPT using the monthly time logs. These are submitted to your field liaison every five weeks and must be signed by your field instructor.

Q: *Will I be able to find a placement close to my home?*

A: The Office of Field Education offers opportunities for placements in several geographic areas throughout Utah. Students should indicate their preferred area in the Practicum Application.

Q: *How many internship hours are required?*

A: It varies by program and year. See below:

- **MSW 1st year “Generalist” = 400 (approximately 13.5 hours per week)**

Students’ weekly schedules are negotiated between the student and agency field instructor.

Q: *Is there a minimum number of hours I need to work per week?*

A: Yes, students must work a minimum of 12 hours per week. It should be noted that if a student does not meet the required total number of hours (perhaps pursuant to an accommodation or other extenuating circumstance), they will receive an I, and may need to incur the cost associated with extending practicum into a 3rd semester.

Q: *Will I be placed with the population of my choice?*

A: We make every attempt to place you in a top ten agency but this cannot be guaranteed.

Q: *What should I do if I have problems in my field placement?*

A: If you have problems with your Field Instructor or in the placement, you are encouraged to handle concerns directly and professionally in the field placement and notify your field liaison. Please refer to the MSW Field Education Policy Handbook for more information.

Q: *Does the University of Utah provide liability insurance?*

A: Yes, the University of Utah provides malpractice insurance. However, in accordance with Section U.C.A. 1953 Section Q (3), if you live outside of Utah, or are

referred to an agency outside of Utah, you will be required to have supplemental insurance through the NASW (www.socialworkers.org) or another professional malpractice entity. When applicable, additional information about supplemental information will be provided by our office.

Field Performance Expectations

Q: *How often should I meet with my Field Instructor for supervision?*

A: CSWE accreditation standards mandate that you have a minimum of 1 hour of weekly face-to-face supervision (in-person, virtual or hybrid) with your BSW or MSW Field Instructor.

Q: *Will my field placement have an organized, structured set of tasks lined up for me to practice all of the required social work competencies?*

A: Some agencies will, others will not. You will be challenged to enhance your own learning needs by working with your field instructor and faculty field liaison to identify tasks that will address the competencies. Your *Learning Plan* will guide you in this process.

Q: *How many of the CSWE competencies do I have to demonstrate to be considered successful in the field placement?*

A: You must demonstrate satisfactory mastery of ALL competencies by the end of the second semester of the field placement. Receiving a “1” in any competency related behavior will result in a NC/E for the class.

Q: *Do I have to follow all of my agency’s policies, even though I’m a student?*

A: Yes, you are expected to follow ALL policies and procedures of your field placement agency. Students terminated for non-compliance with agency policies, the NASW Code of Ethics, the University of Utah Standards for Behavior, laws and or statutes, may be at risk of termination from their field placement. Termination from field may result in a NC/E grade for the field.

Q: *I am interested in becoming a school social worker. Do I need to do anything special to facilitate this?*

A: Yes, you will want to apply for the school social work track as a specialist (2nd year) student. To become a school social worker, you are required to complete a 450-hour school practicum placement (this can happen during the generalist OR specialist year) and two specific school-related courses during the specialist year. We will host a school social work track information session in January and/or you can reach out to your advisor for additional information. Students must complete a formal application process to be considered for the School Social Work Track (See School Social Work - College of Social Work - The University of Utah for more information).

Q: What if I am unhappy with my field placement?

A: We certainly hope you are happy, but if you are not, please consult with your field liaison for guidance. However, this is a graduate level, professional training program that requires considerable responsibility and a high level of adaptability. We hope that you will make every effort to work through the initial transition and address any concerns directly and professionally with your field liaison and instructor. ***Also, we will only refer you to three agencies per semester, regardless of circumstance.***

Field Education Course

Q: Do I have to attend a Field Practicum class in addition to practicum?

A: Yes, a Canvas based practicum seminar (typically a virtual webinar) is a mandatory core component of the field education process and provides an integrative process where you join your peers to discuss your learning experiences, examine the connection of the classroom material and competencies to practice, and reflect on your personal and professional development. The course is facilitated via CANVAS and IPT. You will register for 6511 and 6512

Q: How am I evaluated by my Field Instructor?

A: At the end of each field semester, your Field Instructor will complete a student Field Evaluation that measures your performance. This evaluation is one component of your semester grade. Students must receive a 3 or higher in 80% of competency related behaviors (and no “1”s in final semester) to receive a passing grade for the course.

Q: Will I receive a letter grade for the field seminar?

A: Yes, MSW students will receive a grade.

Q: How is field graded?

A: You earn a grade, but it is issued to you by your faculty field liaison using the following criteria: 1) your field evaluation completed by your Field Instructor (80% of behaviors must be rated a 3 or higher to receive a passing grade); 2) your webinar attendance, participation, engagement, and contribution; 3) completion of the required hours and requirements; 4) timely submission of ALL forms and other required assignments; 5) your adherence to all policies and procedures. Termination from practicum will result in a NC/E grade, which will result in a referral for dismissal from the MSW program.

Q: How will I manage classes, field placement, my job, and life in general?

A: Excellent time management is critical as well as utilizing the support of family, friends, peers, and campus resources to help you manage what can be a very stressful period. The Office of Field Education, advisors and faculty field liaison are here to help you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us.

For questions regarding University of Utah College of Social Work Field Education, please feel free to contact the office of field education.

*For inquiries regarding the MSW program, please contact Diane Buck:
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