
MSW and BSW FAQs

Q: I keep seeing these terms. What is a “Specialist” student? What is a “Generalist” student?

A: These are terms that apply to MSW students only. A specialist student is a student in their second year of practicum. 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: How is my practicum placement determined?

A: Students will complete and submit a field application that will be sent to all admitted and enrolled students via email in the spring. Students will complete this application and submit it, with an updated resume to their ***practicum coordinator***. The practicum coordinator is a College of Social Work faculty member or instructor who has extensive social work practice experience. Generalist students entering practicum for the first time, will then meet with their practicum coordinator to discuss various agency options and answer questions. Rising specialist students will be given the option of meeting with their practicum coordinator. On the application, students will document their interests, and identify their top ten agency selections. Students are expected to adhere to the placement procedures as outlined in the BSW and MSW Field Manuals and cannot secure placements outside of this process. Also, the

practicum coordinator a student meets with for placement may not be the practicum coordinator that follows them during their field experience.

MSW Online Students who reside outside of Utah or in an area without approved agency placements, may be asked to assist in locating an agency with assistance from your practicum coordinator. However, practicum coordinators will support students throughout the process.

Q: I am a BSW student entering practicum. What should I expect?

A: BSW students will receive an email to their UMAIL account regarding a BSW Orientation in the semester preceding their field placement. Students must attend this orientation. Following the orientation students will receive another email from our practicum coordinator regarding a Practicum Application and Resume. Students will list their top agency preferences on the application and schedule a time to interview with the coordinator.

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 selections, it cannot be guaranteed. However, practicum coordinators 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 placement in an agency with evening and weekend hours cannot be guaranteed.

Q: What do I do after I have received an email with my field agency referral?

A: After students receive an email from the Office of Field Education with information regarding the agency to which they are referred for placement, 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: Does the process described above apply to ALL placements?

A: No, there are a handful of agencies that have a separate, independent application

and selection process—these are typically *Specialist* year placements (year two in practicum). Students interested in these placements (a list of these agencies will be sent via email in December/January) will 1) complete the agency application; and 2) interview with the agency before final selections are made *by the agency*. It is still critical that students communicate to their practicum coordinator their intent to apply to one or more of these agencies. Students can apply to one or more of these agencies.

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 practicum coordinator to identify a suitable placement in the area in which they reside.

It should be noted that students may suggest to their practicum coordinator 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 MSW Field Manual.

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: *When does my BSW field placement begin and end?*

A: BSW students complete practicum during their last semester in the program. It will begin on the first day of class for the semester they are enrolled, and end on the last day of class for that semester. If they are completing a 2-semester practicum they will end practicum on the last week of classes in the 2nd semester.

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, students are not permitted to provide any direct services to clients during this period.

**Rising specialist students doing a summer placement are allowed to do up to 100 hours during the preceding spring semester.*

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 practicum coordinator.

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 commitment is required.

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. *Please review the BSW or MSW Manuals for more detailed information regarding the Policies related to holidays, vacations, illness and inclement weather.*

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

A: Students document field hours using the tracking sheets located in the Resource Guide, or by their practicum coordinator or utilizing the method of their choosing. In Spring 2022, our new electronic platform will also provide resources.

It is up to the student to track their own hours during the field placement. Students will be required to document their hours in the assigned logs or process recordings submitted via Canvas.

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:

- **BSW = 450 (approximately 20 hours per week)**
- **MSW 1st year “Generalist” = 450 (approximately 15 hours per week)**
- **MSW 2nd year “Specialist” = 600 (approximately 20 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: Possibly, the purpose of the BSW and MSW first-year placements are to expand your generalist social work knowledge base and offer you an area of learning that may be different from your past experiences. In the MSW second year, you will participate in selecting your own field placement with the area of focus you have identified.

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 on your own in the field placement and notify your practicum coordinator. Please refer to the BSW & MSW Field Education policies 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 practicum coordinator 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. 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).

Field Education Course

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

A: Yes, 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 to practice, and reflect on your personal and professional development. The course is facilitated via CANVAS and ALL assignments must be submitted to receive a passing grade for the course. Please register for the following:

-Generalist MSW: SW 6511 (semester 1) and SW 6512 (semester 2)

-Specialist MSW: SW 6521 (semester 1) and SW 6522 (semester 2)

-BSW: SW 4702 Social Work Practicum and SW 4782.

MSW students: Required to meet for two-three mandatory virtual webinars per semester. These include a class webinar (with peers enrolled in your section) and one or two topical webinars. For 2021-2022, there will be one topical webinar for generalists and two for specialists per semester. These are in addition to the class webinar.

BSW students (in-person): Required to attend weekly seminars.

BSW online students: Required to attend two mandatory virtual webinars per semester.

Q: What is a Learning Plan?

A: The Practicum Learning Plan is a student assignment that outlines the in-agency practice opportunities that will allow you to demonstrate the identified core competencies and behaviors or tasks mandated by the Council on Social Work Education.

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: MSW students will receive a grade. BSW students will receive CR/NC.

Q: *How is field graded?*

A: You earn a grade, but it is issued to you by your practicum coordinator using the following criteria: 1) your field evaluation as completed by your Field Instructor (80% of behaviors must be rated a 3 or higher to receive credit); 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, and all assignments must be submitted to pass the course.

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

A: There is no doubt that good 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 year. The Office of Field Education, advisors and practicum coordinators 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:

diane.buck@socwk.utah.edu

For inquiries regarding the BSW program, please contact Judy Parker:

judy.parker@socwk.utah.edu