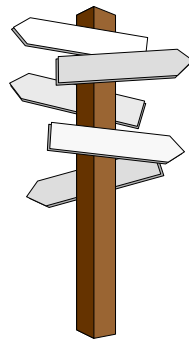


WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
OFFICE OF FIELD EDUCATION

Frequently Asked Questions



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Frequently Asked Questions

Why do social work students have field placements?

Your field placement is an integral component of the curriculum in social work education. It engages you in supervised social work practice, facilitates the development of an awareness of self in the process of intervention, provides opportunities to apply classroom learning, and allows you to practice skills and to learn the values and ethics of the social work profession while enhancing the well-being of people.

When should I expect to apply for my field placement?

You will be notified by e-mail at least a month before your application for field placement is due. The application forms can be found on the Office of Field Education website. It is not possible to specify the deadline for which you will be asked to complete your application, as it is different depending on when your class is entering the field. Please address any questions to the Office of Field Education graduate assistant(s): 269-387-3206 or e-mail: swrk-field@wmich.edu. All forms are found on the web page: <http://www.wmich.edu/%7Ehhs-sw/field/field.htm>.

How do I apply for my field placement and will it meet my needs?

The completion of your application for field education is a very important document that must be completed in a professional manner because the application and a copy of your resume will be sent to potential field instructors to review when considering you for placement.

There are a variety of ways to learn about the human service community. The Office of Field Education has built an **Agency Search** database on the field website. You can also consult local web sites, www.kpl.gov/index.htm or you can talk with other students, faculty members, or meet with the coordinator of field education.

Each student is responsible for learning a sufficient amount of information about potential placement sites to make a determination of his/her top three agency preferences for placement. These preferences will be listed on the field application and the Office of Field Education will make every attempt to assign each student to one of his/her top preferences.

**STUDENTS ARE NOT TO CONTACT AGENCIES TO
DISCUSS FIELD PLACEMENTS!!!**

How will my field placement be selected?

The coordinator of field education has the final responsibility for selecting and determining your field placement. Students will be matched to agencies based on their interests/requests and agency needs. You must interview with the potential agency field instructor who will decide if there is a good “match.” You will be assessed as to your educational background, your professional experience, and your interests. Remember, sometimes what you want and what you need are not always the same. Field placements are an opportunity to “stretch” beyond what you already know, to take risks in developing your professional sense and style and, utmost, an opportunity to learn. Many times, your field placement may help you decide your eventual career path as well.

When registering for my classes, which section of field education should I select?

When you register for the fieldwork course you will need to choose a particular section, but realize you may be switched to another section. This happens for geographic reasons; that is, we try to group all the people placed in Battle Creek, or all the interns at one agency, with one faculty liaison to be more efficient.

How detailed should my resume be?

Your resume is your most valuable document during the placement process. It needs to reflect a “picture” of you. This includes providing information about where you have been and what you have accomplished. The “picture” should exhibit your character traits such as dependability, reliability, and responsibility in as many areas of your life as possible even if some of those areas are nonprofessional or not human service related. It does not need to be limited to one page, but should be kept concise.

Should I put my internships on my resume under work experience or volunteer experience?

We suggest that you put your internships under your work experience. You have been involved in direct practice with supervision, which is preparing you for your career. Use the heading of “Professional Experience” as opposed to “Work Experience” so you can capture experiences related to your career objective, but be sure to identify the experience as being an internship or student placement.

What can I do to de-emphasize little or no work experience?

Remember, any experience whether paid or volunteer will help to define your “picture”. Character traits are usually exhibited in many ways that include volunteer experiences, life experiences (such as being a camp counselor, traveling abroad, helping to raise a family, caring for elderly relatives, etc.), and by paid jobs that are not related to human services (which help to financially support you).

Is it wise to admit my weaknesses?

Remember, sometimes your weaknesses are also your strengths. Be prepared to explain your weakness in terms of an area that you have identified or plan to identify in your learning contract as an area you want to work on improving. Don't exaggerate your weaknesses! Be frank but optimistic that you will improve them because you have openly identified them and want direction and support with them during your field placement.

About how much time will the placement process take?

The goal of the field education office is to have your placement site selected and finalized within four to six weeks after the process starts. Some variation may occur due to vacations of agency staff, etc. You need to take responsibility early for your part in the placement process or you will end up starting your field placement late and having to make up hours. M.S.W. students who are considering the State of Michigan School Certificate need to be very aware of application deadlines due to school social workers not being available to interview potential field placement candidates in the summer.

How should I prepare for my field placement interviews?

The best preparation is no preparation outside of the usual things and just being you! Prepare by learning how to express yourself, your interests, and your experiences. Prepare by choosing an appropriate interview outfit, by being on time (or a few minutes early), and having your resume with you. Remember the manners you were taught as well. ☺ After you have finished your interview, you will need to send a professional letter of thanks to the person(s) with whom you interviewed.

Do I stay at the same placement both years?

If you are a B.S.W. student, you will have one placement in your senior year. Placement considerations include experience and field of service interests.

You will have two separate placements in the master's program unless you are a student in the advanced standing program. The 1st year is called foundation placement and the 2nd year is the concentration placement. All M.S.W. students have a foundation placement PRIOR to declaring their specialization, which is either in the Interpersonal Practice (IP) tract or the Policy, Planning, and Administration (PP&A) tract. **The purpose of the foundation placement is to teach generalist practice skills within a social work setting**, including working with other professionals and with clients. Students will also learn how an agency functions and how services are provided to a client population. Your foundation placement does not need to be in the field of practice that you believe that you will eventually seek employment. The concentration placement *should* be in a field of practice that is your specific area of interest. This field experience is the preparation for your intended career choices. Remember that many social workers take jobs during their careers that are in different fields of practice; relatively few stay focused in one area. So, having two placements in different areas could be beneficial later in your career.

Is it possible to do a field placement where I am also employed?

This is possible and is called a **work-study placement**. There is a formal proposal that must be submitted and officially approved. The field manual contains the guidelines under which a work-study proposal will be considered/accepted and the procedures and requirements for such a proposal that must be achieved. The coordinator of field education will need to review and approve your proposal and evaluate it related to the stated requirements, the School and CSWE accreditation standards, and how the proposal will address your overall education. In a work-study placement, the student must have a field instructor who is not their work supervisor. Additionally, the student must have tasks to perform that are *new learning experiences* and are not their normal work duties. The student and his/her boss must also agree on a plan to assist the student in keeping his/her work responsibilities separate from his/her student tasks. It is not an acceptable plan for a student to work new tasks into his/her usual work routine; time and responsibilities must be kept separate for a work-study placement to be effective.

How many hours are required for my field placement?

The Council on Social Work Education (C.S.W.E.) establishes the policies and procedures for all social work programs. This includes mandating the required field hours that are as follows:

B.S.W.: Hours are dependent on the semester/session you are enrolled in but all students must clock 400 total hours per school year.

Fall/Spring = 16 hours per work week (typically Tuesday and Thursday)
Spring/Summer I = 16 hours per work week in Spring session (typically Tuesday and Thursdays)
29 hours per work week in Summer I session (typically Monday, Wednesday, and Friday)

1st year Foundation Placement (M.S.W. level):

Placements are only made for the fall/spring semesters. Approximately sixteen (16) hours per week totaling 428 hours per year are required. Field days are typically Monday and Tuesday.

2nd year Concentration Placement (M.S.W. level):

Placements are only made for the fall/spring semesters. Approximately sixteen (16) hours per workweek for a total of 472 hours per year are required. Field days are typically Thursday and Friday.

If you are an Advanced Standing M.S.W. candidate a total of 596 hours per year are required. Students pursuing a School Social Work Certificate (M.S.W.) you must put in a total of **500 hours** for the school year (to satisfy the State of Michigan requirements). Some agencies that offer stipends also require more hours than are required by the Council on Social Work Education, so become aware of any agency requirements.

You are not expected to be at your field placement on legal, agency, or academic holidays. However, you still need to complete the total number of hours required for your placement. Your driving time to and from your field placement, field laboratories, and field seminars cannot be counted toward your placement hours. Some activities outside your agency may be counted toward your field hours, such as attending a conference or the state Legislative Day, if you and your field instructor agree that the experience is an appropriate contribution to your education.

Extended study students need to be aware that field placements are typically during the work week so accommodations with current employers needs to be addressed very early in the student's program plan of study.

Can I vary my schedule?

Your schedule must be decided upon in conjunction with your field instructor. You must put in the required hours. Any variations of your schedule must be approved by your field instructor prior to implementation. Your faculty liaison should be kept apprised of your schedule at all times.

What about transportation?

Transportation to and from your field placement site is your responsibility. Please be sure to inform the coordinator of field education of any special circumstances you might have. Efforts will be made to meet your geographic preference but you will not be guaranteed a local placement site.

Many agencies will require you to use your own vehicle during the course of your placement and most will reimburse you for mileage. If you will be using your car for agency related business, **YOU MUST HAVE A VALID DRIVER'S LICENSE AND CARRY INSURANCE ON YOUR VEHICLE!** If you are involved in an accident in the line of duty while in your field placement, your insurance will be the first place a claim is made. Western Michigan University's liability insurance will be the second tier for a claim. Make sure to ask about the requirements and expectations of you and the use of your vehicle during the initial interview with agency staff.

What are the differences between volunteer, student, and employee roles?

While you are a student in an agency setting, the first role you are taking on is that of a student. You are there to learn and to be trained and supervised. Many times agency staff may see you as a volunteer or may treat you as an employee. You may be required to attend new volunteer or new employee orientation. You must follow all agency rules and procedures, but you should not be expected to perform like an employee. Many of your experiences will be similar to those of regular employees, but you are a student who continually seeks the guidance of the trained professionals in the agency setting.

How are field instructors selected and trained?

Field instructors have all been students at one time or another. Many field instructors want to give something back to the profession and volunteer to become a part of your professional field education.

Agency administrators decide if their agency can devote the time and energy towards student training and field instructors are initially chosen or volunteer with the backing of their administrators. Field instructors are mentored by the faculty liaisons and the coordinator of field education. Orientation to the School of Social Work's policies, procedures, requirements, and expectations is required. Evaluation of field instructors occurs at the end of each year. Field instructors are donating their valuable time to you so appreciate their efforts and remember that they are doing this without extra pay!

What are social service agencies looking for in their student interns?

Agency staff want motivated, self-starting, and hard working students who are excited about becoming a social work professional. Agency staff is willing to devote time and energy to students who are eager to learn, responsible, dependable, reliable, and who are willing to carry out assignments in a responsible manner. They are looking for students who come to their field placement prepared; who act, think, and dress in a professional manner; who will work within agency policies and procedures; and who exhibit the values and ethics of the social work profession.

What is the difference between the field education coordinator, the faculty liaison, and the field instructor?

The field education coordinator is the person who is responsible overall for the field education component of the social work curriculum. The field education coordinator assigns the student placements, develops placement sites, coordinates all activities related to field education, and administers the overall field education program.

The faculty liaison is the person from the School of Social Work's faculty who will visit you at your placement site and who works in a partnership model to serve as the channel for communication between classroom faculty, the field instructor, and the field education coordinator. The faculty liaison is available for regular consultation with students and field instructors. The faculty liaison is the person to

consult with any problems that arise. This person will determine the final grade for your field placement in concert with your field instructor.

The field instructor is the person who will mentor and supervise you while you are in the agency setting. Field instructors are most often employees of the agency and have the goal of training you over the course of your experience. They will provide the daily/weekly supervision of your activities and work closely with the faculty liaison in monitoring your progress and growth. All problems with your field experience should be discussed with your field instructor **first** if possible. Many agencies will have additional opportunities for supervision with a trained social worker if your team leader/mentor is a non-social work professional. All social work students must be exposed to social work educated and credentialed social work professionals during their field placement. It may be necessary for a student to have a secondary field instructor who is social work credentialed and who will oversee the placement by co-signing all official documents, meeting with the faculty liaison when they visit, and providing social work supervision.

Will I receive information that addresses safety issues in my field placement?

You will receive safety preparation information in the field laboratories taught by the faculty liaison prior to entering your field placement. The training includes awareness of danger and assessment of the client, environment, and oneself. In addition, it includes intervention skills to de-escalate potentially volatile situations.

Most agencies will require that you complete their agency specific orientation or safety training so that you are also familiar with their individual policies and procedures.

What are field education laboratories?

Prior to entering your first field placement (or your senior year if you are a B.S.W candidate), you will be required to attend the scheduled hours of the field education labs conducted by the faculty liaisons. These labs are designed to orient you to the field education program, teach basic communication skills, enhance group cohesiveness, and help socialize you to the social work profession. You will practice basic interviewing skills and be taught techniques such as attending, reflection of feelings, use of immediacy, clarification, and summarizing. You will have opportunities to role-play and receive peer feedback.

For the B.S.W. student, these labs are scheduled the first week and a half of the semester. For the 1st year M.S.W. student, these labs are an eight (8) week series of 2 ½ hour classes.

What is a learning contract?

The learning contract will be explained fully in your field education lab. Basically it is an agreement between you and your field instructor on how to meet your learning objectives for your field experience. You have worked to identify these in your field application so you are already off to a good start. Your faculty liaison is a good source of information about these contracts also.

How will I be evaluated?

Evaluation is both an individual and a shared process and is the “springboard” for growth. Evaluation is an ongoing process that occurs informally each and every time you meet with your field instructor. At the end of the semester, your formal evaluation will be completed by your field instructor with the help of the faculty liaison. Areas that are covered in your evaluation should be reviewed continually throughout the semester and experiences related to the evaluation should be included in your learning goals. There are

copies of the evaluation documents in the field manual. There should be no surprises and remember, *NO ONE IS EXPECTED TO BE PERFECT!* As a student, you will make mistakes. How you learn from them is an important part of your evaluation. How open you are about your areas for improvement, how well you are able to communicate and how you handle constructive criticism are all very necessary ingredients to your overall development as a successful social work professional.

Will I need malpractice insurance coverage for my field placement?

Malpractice insurance is included in the fees when you sign up for your field placement. You are included on a student professional liability policy handled by the business office at Western Michigan University. If your placement will need to go beyond the scheduled semester/session for educational reasons, a memo must be generated by the student and field instructor requesting an extension of the liability insurance.

You will be responsible for any medical expenses related to any accident or illness, etc., that occurs during your field placement because workman's compensation does NOT cover you. Every student is encouraged to carry a medical insurance policy.

If I have a problem, what do I do?

The first person you should talk to is your field instructor. If you need additional consultation after this, contact your faculty liaison. The liaison is the person who will facilitate the problem-solving process if the problems cannot be resolved between you and your field instructor. The faculty liaison will contact the field education coordinator if appropriate. If you experience problems with your faculty liaison, first talk with them and then contact the field education coordinator. If the problem cannot be resolved, the director of the School will intercede. Problem-solving abilities are important skills that all students need to develop. If you have additional questions, you can contact the field education coordinator.

One final note: You need to become familiar with the National Association of Social Worker's (N.A.S.W.) Code of Ethics (<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>). This code dictates your practice as a social work professional in a human service agency. You will be required to uphold the standards of this code so familiarize yourself with its contents. If you would like more information about becoming a member of the National Association of Social Workers, go to their web page: <http://www.socialworkers.org/default.asp>. The link to the NASW Code of Ethics can also be found on the Office of Field Education website.