

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

BSW FIELD PRACTICUM:

What is the different between “Field Practicum” and “Field Placement”?

- The “Field Practicum” refers to the total field education experience, consisting of both a weekly integrative field seminar and a field placement.

When Do I Complete My Field Practicum(s)?

- Practicums begin in the Fall Semester of your senior year and continue across both the Fall and Spring Semesters in the same field site.

How Much Time Do I Spend in my Field Placement?

- BSW placements are a total of 480 hours; this averages about 18 hours per week.

What is the Weekly Integrative Field Seminar?

- This seminar provides students with an opportunity to discuss and compare field placement experiences, learn from and teach each other, examine personal values and ethical issues in social work practice, and further integrate knowledge and experience through structured assignments, activities, and group process, which may also be connected to assignments in other courses. The overall goal of the practicum seminars is to help students make connections between their academic work in social work and their field experiences. In addition, by bringing students together from many different fieldwork settings, the seminars offer an opportunity to broaden each student’s exposure to the field of social work through the sharing of experiences and ideas in the seminar sessions.
- Students attend this seminar in-person weekly and remain in the same seminar section during the entire placement (both semesters). The instructor for the Field Seminar is also the student’s faculty liaison for the field placement, conducting site visits and serving as the primary contact between the social work program and the field instructor field site.

When does the field placement process begin?

- Students should understand the requirements and timing of field placements concurrently with application and acceptance into the program. Advance discussion with employers, family, and other support systems to consider adjustments to schedules and responsibilities is often very helpful in facilitating a successful field placement experience.
- Students complete an Application for Field Practicum concurrently with applying to the BSW Program. This application is due November 1st. During the month of October, students will meet individually with the Assistant Field Education Director. This meeting will provide an opportunity to ask questions about completing the application and the Field Placement process. Once the student is accepted into the BSW Program, the Field Placement process begins. The field education program works in collaboration with each student individually over the course of

the spring semester and summer to obtain an appropriate field placement. It is essential that students understand that locating and establishing new practicum sites can take a number of weeks and, in some cases, may take several months. Students who return incomplete practicum applications and/or do not actively collaborate with field education staff may risk delayed entrance into the field and subsequent delay in completing field requirements.

Can I choose my own placement?

- Students work in a collaborative process with the Field Education Program to determine field placements. While students' particular interests and needs are considered to the extent possible, it is important that students understand that the Field Education Program staff makes final decisions regarding field placement assignments and those decisions are based on many variables. Occasionally students will have an interest in a placement site that our program does not have an affiliation. This may open an opportunity for the Field Education Program staff to explore the feasibility of the potential site to determine if it meets the requirements for a social work field placement. In other cases, the lack of an affiliation with a particular placement site may be the result of a previous decision made by the Field Education Program and not be an option. Students should not initiate contact with a potential field placement site without discussion and approval from the Field Education Program.

Does my field instructor have to be a social worker? I know a great supervisor with a degree in psychology and I really could learn a lot from her.

- CSWE standards require that all field instructors for BSW students have a BSW or MSW from an accredited school of social work. Our program also requires that the field instructor have at least two years of post-degree related work experience. In certain circumstances a field instructor without a social work degree may be considered if an individualized plan can be developed (and approved by the Field Department) to assure the social work perspective is reinforced in the placement.

My placement interests are very specific, and I feel it's important that I have several options and interviews so I can make the best decision. How does that work?

- While meeting the student's educational needs and program requirements are the first criteria for field placement, student preferences related to kind of setting and location will be considered to the extent possible. Every effort is made to arrange an interview that has a strong likelihood of being a good "match." At the same time, there are several external variables that may impact field placement options and, while students might prefer to have several options, *this is just not feasible and would not serve the best interest of the student or the program*. For example, "waiting" to interview somewhere else could likely result in the original placement not being available since field placements are competitive (both within our program and with other social work programs). Geographic restrictions may exist which may make it necessary for students to commute some distance to their placement. In addition, some students will need to commute to access specific kinds of settings that are not available closer to their home. The availability of placements changes annually, so some students will need to accept placements that, while they may not exactly fit the student's primary long-term interests, do provide substantial and

appropriate learning opportunities. Some organizations only accept MSW students; others have only a certain number of placements or have application deadlines.

- Students will interview with one potential site at a time and the results of that interview will guide next steps.

Where are placements located and how far will I have to travel for my placement?

- Students should expect to complete their field placements in a location that is *within no more than a 60-mile radius of Westfield State University*. It is crucial that students understand this does not mean that the Field Education Program can develop a placement in every location that is within a 60-mile radius. The social work program has affiliation agreements with over two hundred field placement sites within this geographic area and continues to develop additional sites each year. While some student's complete placements within a short distance from their home, other students will need to commute to access specific kinds of settings that are not available closer to home or WSU.

Can I see a list of placement options?

- Placement options change very frequently and, therefore, we do not publish a "list" of placements. When you begin the field application process, Field Education Program staff will talk with you about possibilities based on the information in your application and resume, conversations with you, your experience thus far in the social work program, and information from faculty that have had experience with you.

What if I don't have a driver's license or I don't have a car?

- It is possible to obtain a field placement that is on a bus route. However, it is very important that you understand that not having a driver's license and/or access to a car or reliable transportation may significantly limit the options that are available to you. It is your responsibility to make sure that the field department is aware of your situation, and, ultimately, you are still responsible for obtaining a reliable way of meeting your commitments to be at your field placement as scheduled.

Can I do my field placement at my place of employment?

- Students can request to complete their field placements at their place of employment. There are specific requirements for an employment-based placement that are available on the Employment-based Field Application and the Field Education Manual.

Are there any paid placements?

- Paid placements (stipends) are *extremely* rare and students should plan to finance their education from other sources. Students entering the advanced practicum with a particular interest in integrated care may want to consider applying for the Integrated Behavioral Health Collaboration (IBHC) Fellowship that does include a \$10,000 stipend.

I know a great agency, but they asked about me transporting clients in my car. Can I do that?

- Students are not covered under the Commonwealth's self-insurance policy maintained by Westfield State University for the transportation of clients in their own vehicles or for driving

agency-owned vehicles. Standard, personal automobile insurance policies also do not typically cover the transportation of clients in one's own vehicle. Thus, *students are not permitted to transport clients in their own vehicles, nor should they be asked to transport clients in agency vehicles unaccompanied or as the driver of the agency vehicle unless the agency specifically provides insurance that will cover the student under these circumstances.* If students accompany clients in an agency vehicle driven by an agency employee, an additional agency employee, who is the responsible party, should accompany them both.

I have to work and can't get time off. Can I do my placement in the evening and on weekends?

- There are a *very* limited number of placements that include *some* hours in the evening and/or on weekends and, like other placements, these change from year to year. Your BSW class schedule for the senior year is designed so you are in class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This schedule intentionally leaves Monday, Wednesday and Fridays open for you to complete your internship hours during business hours.

Do I stay in my field placement during the break between the fall and spring semester?

- Students are expected to negotiate field placement hours during the semester break directly with their field instructor and in consideration of client and field site policies and obligations. Students are encouraged to collaborate with their faculty field liaison regarding any uncertainty about field placement during the semester break.

I saw something in the Field Manual about “readiness for field” what does that mean?

- Students in the BSW Program will generally be considered to be ready to enter the field at the scheduled time for their chosen sequence of study. The social work faculty recognizes that all students come to the field experience with some areas of strength and some areas that need further development. Students are not expected (and should not expect) to be expert practitioners at the beginning, or at the end, of their field placement experiences. However, it is the responsibility of the Social Work Department, the Field Education Program, and each student in the program to make sure that students do not enter the field until they have achieved the level of knowledge and skill that is required for the protection and promotion of client, agency, and student well-being. For this reason, the Field Education Program may, upon occasion, recommend that a student delay entering into the field education portion of the BSW Program. The Field Education Manual discusses in detail the potential reasons and circumstances that may result in a student not entering field at a particular time in their education.

What if I have to check my text messages or my email when I am at my internship?

- This is NOT allowed. This is an example of unprofessional behavior. Please review the section of the BSW Program Manual titled “**Use of Field Site Materials, Social Media, and Confidentiality**” for the full policy and expectations.

I have some legal issues from my past. Will that keep me from getting a field placement?

- Many human service organizations are required to perform criminal background (CORI) and Sex Offender Registry checks and use the results in making decisions regarding acceptance of students for placement. In addition, Protective Service agencies will check whether student applicants have histories of involvement with Protective Services. Some organizations may have additional requirements regarding medical clearances prior to acceptance. Your field application will ask you about these kinds of situations and it is crucial that you work closely with the field department and that you understand your available placements may be limited.

I still have questions after reading this FAQ document. What should I do?

- Much more detail is available in our Field Education Manual. You are expected to review this manual in full before applying for field and throughout your participation in field. You can also view the Field Application and Employment-Based Field Application at the same site. Please note that these documents and manual are updated from at least annually, so you are advised to always assure that you are reviewing the most recent version (all versions are dated).
- The link is: <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/academics/social-work-department/field-education>

You are always welcome to be in touch with the Assistant Field Education Director or another member of the Field Education Staff:

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