

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

### MSW 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 and continue across both the Fall and Spring Semesters in the same field site.
- Your program of study determines when you complete your Field Practicum(s).
  - Full-Time (2 year): Foundation Practicum Year 1; Advanced Practicum Year 2
  - Part-Time (3 year): Foundation Practicum Year 2; Advanced Practicum Year 3
  - Part-Time (4 year): Foundation Practicum Year 2; Advanced Practicum Year 4
  - Full-Time Advanced Standing (1 year): Advanced Practicum Year 1
  - Part-Time Advanced Standing (2 year): Advanced Practicum Year 2

#### How Much Time Do I Spend in my Field Placement?

- Foundation Placements are a minimum total of 400 hours; this averages about 14-16 hours per week.
- Advanced Placements are a minimum total of 500 hours; this averages about 18-20 hours per week.

#### What is the difference between the Foundation and Advanced Practicum?

- Both the Foundation and Advanced Practicums focus on the demonstration of social work competencies informed by the holistic dimensions of knowledge, values, skills and cognitive and affective processes of social work practice. The Foundation Practicum is focused on building the skills of generalist practice while the Advanced Practicum is focused on the opportunity for students to deepen social work skills and apply more complex understanding of clinical social work practice.

#### 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.
- During the Foundation Placement, students attend this seminar in-person weekly; the Advanced Seminar is a weekly online course. Students remain in the same seminar section during the entire placement. Students register for the practicum course, including seminar, during the regular registration timeframes. However, it is important for students to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Field Education Director in order to provide the best possible learning environment for all of the seminar participants. The location of each student's placement, students' social work experience, and overall needs of each seminar group are considered in making these assignments. 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, the field instructor and 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.
- Full-time incoming students begin the field application process concurrently with acceptance to the program. Current (returning) students begin the application process very early in the spring semester *prior* to upcoming fall semester that they are scheduled to begin a placement.

### **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 MSW students have an MSW from an accredited school of social work. Additionally, the Commonwealth of Mass requires that the field instructor also have a social worker license, either an LCSW or LICSW. Our program also requires that the field instructor have at least two years of post-degree related work experience.

### **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 foundation or advanced year 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 in Westfield OR within no more than a 30-mile radius of Westfield State University in Worcester.*** 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 or 30-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.

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

- Students can request to complete *one* of 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.

### **What is the IBHC Fellowship?**

- In 2017 the Social Work Program at WSU was awarded a 4-year Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) grant for MSW Program and development and support. The Interdisciplinary Behavioral Health Collaboration (IBHC) Project includes a central focus to provide education and training to MSW students. This is an intensive training fellowship for MSW students completing their final (advanced) clinical practicum. IBHC Fellowships are competitively awarded each year and provide a \$10,000 stipend for the academic training year. Students interested in the Fellowship must apply concurrently with their application for the MSW advanced year practicum. A separate application will be available on the Social Work Department Field Education Page. More detail about the IBHC Fellowship is available in the Field Education Manual and on the department website.

### **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. Within the limited number of placements with evening and/or weekend hours, most only accept students for the advanced year placement due to the expectation for more independent activities. *The overwhelming majority of placement sites require students be available during normal daytime business hours and it is crucial that students plan accordingly prior to beginning the field placement process.* Students should also refer to the Field Education Manual regarding policies for evening/weekend placements.

### **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 MSW 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 MSW 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.

### **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 a member of the Field Education Staff:**

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