



# Department of Social Work

# MSW Field Education Manual

# 2022-2023

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**Westfield State University Department of Social Work  
MSW Field Education Manual**

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# **I: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

## **Introduction to the Field Education Manual and Social Work Field Education**

Social Work Field Education is a partnership involving the Social Work Department, Field Education Program, Social Work Faculty and staff, Community Partners, Field Instructors, and graduate social work students. This Field Manual provides all partners with an overview of the following:

- Foundation and Advanced MSW field placements
- Application and assignment to a field placement
- Selection of field sites and field instructors
- Mutual responsibilities of the Social Work Department, Field Education Program, Community Partners, Field Instructors, Faculty Field Liaisons and students
- Key policies and procedures related to field education

It is essential that students, field instructors, and faculty field liaisons carefully review the material in this Field Education Manual. Students are expected to retain and use this Field Manual prior to and throughout their time in the Westfield State University (WSU) Social Work Program. This manual is provided as a reference guide and is not intended to replace contact with Field Education Program staff. Students, field instructors, and faculty field liaisons are encouraged to contact the Field Education Program with any questions or concerns about information contained in this Field Manual or any other aspect of the field education experience.

Specific policies, procedures, and other information related to the Covid-19 pandemic will be provided as separate documents and not repeated in this Field Manual.

## **Use of this Manual in conjunction with MSW Program Manual**

Students are advised to use this Field Manual in conjunction with the MSW Program Manual that is available on the program website. Information about the entire curriculum, faculty, and program-wide policies are detailed in the Program Manual and, while referenced, are not repeated in this Field Manual.

## **Competency-Based Education in the Field**

Social Work education is competency-based. Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being.

The framework for competency-based education includes a focus on the assessment of the student's ability to demonstrate the competencies rather than only on the assessment of inputs (such as coursework and resources). Social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies, with specific observable behaviors for each competency. These competencies are reflected in the Social Work Program's Mission Statement and Overarching Program Goals. The

competencies for both MSW Foundation and MSW Advanced years can be found on the Program's website and in the MSW Program Manual.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and our social work program recognize a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by the holistic dimensions of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations.

### **Overview of The MSW Field Practicum - Social Work's Signature Pedagogy**

The field practicum is recognized as social work's "signature pedagogy" by the Council on Social Work Education, a national organization that is the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States. A "pedagogy" is a form of educational practice and a "signature pedagogy" is a profession's central and unique way of teaching and learning about how to become a knowledgeable and skilled member of that profession. The field practicum is considered to be Social Work's signature pedagogy because it offers students the opportunity to practice and demonstrate competency of the skills learned in the classroom through supervised practice with actual clients in a social service environment; to understand the relevance of conceptual frameworks, theories, and empirical research findings for addressing real life problems; to examine and apply their understanding of social work values and ethics; to develop a professional identity as a social worker; and to observe and learn from experienced social workers who are currently practicing in the field.

The profession of Social Work views learning in the classroom and learning in the field as interrelated, complementary, and equally important ways of developing social work knowledge, values, and skills. Classroom and field-based experiences are not seen as separate learning environments, but as mutually enhancing learning opportunities. Social work students are viewed as active learners who take what they learn in the classroom into the field and bring what they learn in the field back into the classroom. Students acquire research-based, conceptual, and theoretical knowledge about practice and policy issues relevant to their field experiences in both the classroom and in the field placement setting. At the same time, they develop an understanding of and capacity to apply the practice-based knowledge and experience of both their classroom instructors and their agency instructors and co-workers. Drawing upon their experiences in the field, students learn from each other, as well as from the instructor in the classroom.

For this reason, social work classroom and field experiences share the same overall learning goal, which is to work toward demonstrated competency for entry-level professional practice in the field of Social Work as identified in the nine social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

### **The Foundation and Advanced Social Work Field Practicums**

The Masters in Social Work Program at Westfield State University includes several options for the overall timeframe to complete the program curriculum (*please refer to the Program Manual for detailed descriptions of each option*). Generally, students enrolled in the Traditional Options (two years full-time or three/four years part-time) complete both a Foundation and Advanced Field Practicum. Students enrolled in the Advanced Standing Options (one year full-time or two years part-time) generally complete only an Advanced Field Practicum.

Each Field Practicum is completed over the course of two semesters and includes both a field placement and a weekly integrative field seminar. The Foundation Field Practicum requires a minimum of 400 hours (approximately 16 hours per week) and the Advanced Field Practicum requires a minimum of 500 hours (approximately 20 hours per week), for a total of at least 900 hours of field practicum experience in approved settings under the supervision of professional social workers.

### **The Foundation Practicum Courses: SOCW 0561 and SOCW 0562**

The foundation year social work practicum is generally completed over the course of both semesters of the first year of the MSW program for full-time students. Part-time students complete the Foundation Year Field Practicum over both semesters of their second year in the program.

The focus of the foundation year practicum is reflected in the first of the Social Work Program's two overarching goals: *The program prepares graduates who will have mastered the knowledge, values, and skills of the social work professional generalist practice core.*

According to the Council on Social Work Education:

Generalist practice is grounded in the liberal arts and the person and environment construct. To promote human and social well-being, generalist practitioners use a range of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The generalist practitioner identifies with the social work profession and applies ethical principles and critical thinking in practice. Generalist practitioners incorporate diversity in their practice and advocate for human rights and social and economic justice. They recognize, support, and build on the strengths and resiliency of all human beings. They engage in research-informed practice and are proactive in responding to the impact of context on professional practice.

(From the 2015 Education Policy and Accreditations Standards, available at [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx))

Concurrent to the hours each week spent in the field setting, foundation year practicum students also participate in a weekly synchronous integrative seminar throughout both semesters of the foundation year. 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 their 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 and to work toward demonstrated competency for entry-level generalist practice in the field of Social Work as identified in the nine MSW Foundation social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

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. Specific goals and assignments for each seminar and for each semester of practicum will be provided in the course syllabus and may be adapted throughout the course to meet the specific needs of the group.

Students register for the practicum course, including seminar, during the regular registration timeframe. However, it is important for students to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Field Education Program in order to provide the best possible learning environment for all 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. Students remain in the same seminar section for both the fall and spring semester.

### **The Advanced Practicum Courses: SOCW 0661 and SOCW 0662**

The advanced year social work practicum is generally completed over the course of both semesters in the second year of the MSW program for full-time students. Part-time students complete the advanced year practicum during their third or fourth year while advanced standing students complete this practicum during their one year in the program (part-time advanced standing students complete this practicum in the second year).

The focus of the advanced year practicum is reflected in the second of the Social Work Program's two overarching goals: *The program prepares graduates who will have advanced knowledge, values, and skills for clinical social work practice.*

According to the Council on Social Work Education:

Advanced practitioners refine and advance the quality of social work practice and that of the larger social work profession. They synthesize and apply a broad range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills. In areas of specialization, advanced practitioners assess, intervene, and evaluate to promote human and social well-being. To do so they suit each action to the circumstances at hand, using the discrimination learned through experience and self-improvement. Advanced practice incorporates all of the core competencies augmented by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration.

(From the 2015 Education Policy and Accreditations Standards, available at [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx))

In addition to the hours each week spent in the field setting, advanced year students also participate in a weekly asynchronous integrative seminar throughout both semesters of the advanced year. Specific goals and assignments for each seminar and for each semester of placement will be provided in the course syllabus and may be adapted throughout the course to meet the specific needs of the group.

This advanced social work practicum requires students to continue to apply and integrate the

knowledge and skills gained in their previous practicum and academic courses in human behavior, social work practice, policy, research, and elective topics. Direct practice, field supervision, process recordings, seminar discussions, integrative journals, and case consultations are utilized as learning tools and require students to directly apply these concepts in their social work practice. The goal of this course is to increase the ability of students to apply theory to practice in the development of their social work knowledge, attitude, values, and skills at an advanced level and to demonstrate competency for entry-level clinical practice in the field of Social Work as identified in the nine MSW advanced social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

Students register for the practicum course, including seminar, during the regular registration timeframe. However, it is important for students to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Field Education Program in order to provide the best possible learning environment for all 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. Students remain in the same seminar section for both the fall and spring semester.

## **II. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE FIELD EDUCATION PLACEMENT PROCESS**

### **Preparing for the Field Placement Application Process**

Students should begin to think about the kinds of field experiences that would be appropriate to their learning needs and interests concurrently with their application and acceptance into the MSW program. Students are encouraged to discuss their post-masters career interests with field education staff, who may be able to assist them in learning more about services and opportunities in specific practice areas. It is generally recommended that students complete their social work field placements in two different areas of practice in order to develop a wider range of knowledge. Because of the Program's single concentration in clinical practice, students are expected to complete an Advanced Practicum in a setting where they have opportunities to directly apply clinical concepts and skills. Regardless of the client populations served and services provided, foundation year field placements must offer the student a *generalist practice* experience and advanced year field placements must offer the student an *advanced practice experience*, as defined the Social Work Program and the Council on Social Work Education.

Also, concurrently with application and acceptance into the program, students must also evaluate and plan for the time commitment of completing a field placement. Advance discussion with employers, family, and other support systems to consider adjustments to daytime schedules and responsibilities is crucial in facilitating a successful field placement experience. Specific information regarding the requirements for field placement hours is provided in both Section I (Overview of the MSW Field Placement) and Section V (Responsibilities of the Student) of this manual.



## **Applying for the Social Work Field Practicum**

Active students receive an email notification during the second half of the Fall Semester with specific instructions to begin the field application process for the following academic year. Practicum Application Forms are available on the WSU Social Work Department Field Education website following the opening of the field application process. Students who are not actively completing coursework at the time the application process begins (i.e. on leave of absence and planning to return the following academic year) may not receive an email notification and are individually responsible for contacting the Field Education Program directly to initiate the field application process before the identified due date. Newly accepted full-time students are required to complete the field application within ten days of acceptance to the MSW Program.

Applications require information in several areas, including student interests, previous experience, availability, interests in specific client populations, practice areas, specific practicum sites, previous criminal history, immunizations, etc. Students must submit their completed practicum application forms by the due date indicated on the instructions. Each application must also include an updated resume that may be provided to potential field sites. Students applying for an employment-based internship must also complete a secondary application related to the particular type of internship. 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 or not be possible at all. Students who return incomplete or late 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.

In determining a student's readiness for field placement, field education staff will review the student's field application form(s), information provided by the student during the MSW Program application process, the student's academic record thus far in the program and University, and may additionally interview the student by phone and/or in person as well as request information from WSU faculty that have experience with the student. The quality of the student's participation in the field placement and interview process is also essential in evaluating a student's readiness for the field education component of the program.

While meeting the student's educational needs and program requirements are necessarily the first criteria for field placement, student preferences are also considered. The field application provides an opportunity for students to discuss their preferences related to kind of setting/population, location of the placement, and availability. It is important for students to understand that, while their preferences will be considered to the extent possible and as prioritized by the student on the application, this does not mean that their preferences can/will be met in their field placement assignment.

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 Field Education 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 are ***not*** permitted to initiate contact with a potential field placement site without prior discussion and approval from the Field Education Program.

In addition to educational needs, program requirements, and student preferences, there are several external variables that may impact field placement options. For example, geographic location is a central variable in the availability of field placements. ***For the 2022-2023 academic year, students in the Westfield Ongrounds Program should expect their field placements to be within a 60-mile radius of the WSU Campus, while students in the Online Program should expect to complete field placements within Massachusetts. For the 2023-2024 academic year,*** students in the Online Program, that are in the Advanced full-time and full-time traditional programs should expect to complete their field placements within Massachusetts. ***For the 2024-2025 academic year,*** students in the Online Program can complete their field internships in Massachusetts and within a 50-mile radius from Massachusetts in the following states, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. ***Starting in the 2025-2026 academic year,*** students in the Online Program should expect to complete their internships in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. 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 of WSU or every location within Massachusetts. Students need to be prepared to travel as it may be expected multiple days per week to complete their field placements. While some students 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 their home or WSU.

*Students are expected to be available to complete all of their practicum hours during regular daytime business hours.* While some evening and weekend hours may be arranged under certain very rare circumstances, there are very few placement sites that offer evening and weekend practicum hours, especially hours with the required level of supervision. In addition, all students are required to participate in at least some regularly scheduled agency staff and clinical meetings, which are generally held during daytime hours, in order to gain the full experience of working in a social service environment. It is crucial that students not assume that they will obtain one of the very few evening/weekend placements as these assignments are determined within the same criteria as discussed in Section II of this manual (Applying for the Social Work Field Practicum) and are typically highly competitive. Students in one of the part-time programs are eligible to apply for a placement that includes evening and/or weekend hours. Students in the full-time program are not eligible for evening/weekend placements.

Students who have been accepted into the full-time MSW program are strongly encouraged to evaluate their ability to work full-time in addition to completing their coursework and completing the approximately 16 hours (foundation placement) or 20 hours (advanced placement) of field practicum weekly. It is not uncommon that students who work full time and/or do not have flexibility in their work hours find it necessary to adjust their hours of employment and/or consider an employment-based field placement. Each student must consider his/her unique circumstances and plan accordingly to meet program requirements.

It is also common that the availability of placements changes annually so a particular placement site and/or field instructor from a previous year may not be an option in a current year. Some students will need to accept placements that, while they may not fit the student's primary long-term interests or geographic location preference, do provide substantial and appropriate learning opportunities.

Some organizations only accept foundation or advanced year students; others have a certain number of placements or have application deadlines. While the above represent the most common external variables, unique variables exist each year and are considered in the field placement process. Additional crucial information regarding applying for the field practicum is discussed under Section V, Responsibilities of the Student.

Students may not, under any circumstances, commit to a field placement, including an employment-based field placement, without prior approval and assignment of the placement by field education staff.

### **Employment-based Field Placement**

Students who are interested in doing their field placement at their place of employment will indicate this preference on their application form and complete an *additional* Employment-based Proposal and Contract available on the Social Work Field Education website.

Generally, the term “employment-based field placement” refers to a situation in which the employer grants the student *release time* to use some of his/her regular employment hours to complete a field placement that meets the Social Work Program’s criteria. This type of field placement is highly preferable to an “add on” placement, given the high demands of maintaining employment while also attending graduate classes and completing a 16-20 hour/week placement. However, some sites only offer the student additional, unpaid hours to complete a separate, unpaid (add on) field placement in the organization where they are employed. Students should carefully consider whether to accept a field placement in addition to full-time employment within the same organization, particularly if the student is in the full-time MSW program, and should consider the possibility that it may not be possible to find enough hours in the week to perform adequately as both employees and as students under these circumstances. Regardless of whether the placement is part of the student’s regular hours or “add on” hours, students and site administrators must agree that a placement in an agency where the student is employed requires a new and separate set of responsibilities and different supervision within the agency setting.

### **Employment-based Placement Application Procedures**

Students who are requesting an employment-based field placement must work with the Field Education Program and the representative from the employment site to develop an *Employment-Based Field Placement Contract*. Students are responsible for completing the employment-based application and obtaining all the required information and signature approvals from their employer. Field Education Staff will interview the student (in person or over the telephone) and may conduct a site visit if the agency is not an existing WSU Social Work Program field placement, prior to determining whether or not the employment-based placement will be approved.

### **Employment-Based Placement Requirements**

In order for a field placement at the student’s place of employment to be approved, the following criteria must be met:

- The student/employee has been employed at the organization for a minimum of 3 months prior to applying for an employment-based field placement.
- The student's place of employment must allow the student/employee to attend required classes.
- The field placement must provide a placement experience
  - in an area, program, or service different from the one where the student is currently employed, has been employed, or has had a previous field placement.
  - that includes new learning opportunities (i.e., the opportunity to work with at least some of the following: different client populations, different intervention methods, different policies and procedures, different community interfaces, different agency staff, etc.).
- The student's place of employment must provide a Field Instructor who has a Masters (MSW) degree in Social Work from a CSWE accredited program and
  - has been employed by the organization for at least one year,
  - has a minimum of two years of post-masters social work experience,
  - is not the student's current employment supervisor,
  - holds the appropriate social work licensure as described in detail in Section III of this manual (Criteria for Selection of Field Sites and Field Instructors),
- The assigned Field Instructor must agree to provide the student with a minimum of one hour/week of individual supervision and must also ensure that the student will receive at least one additional hour/week of group supervision and/or task-oriented supervision.

If the supervisor has not previously supervised social work students, the organization must allow the Field Instructor to participate in a field orientation meeting and in Supervision in Field Instruction (SIFI) training, as required by the Westfield State University Department of Social Work. SIFI training completed at another accredited MSW program may be accepted if it meets Westfield State University Program requirements for Field Instructor training. Consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring field instructor training and competence or waiving of the SIFI requirement.

- The field agency must establish a formal affiliation agreement with the Westfield State University Department of Social Work.

## **Field Placement Stipends**

In certain (and very rare) circumstances, field placements may be available that include a stipend. Students may receive a stipend in a field placement, as long as the student is considered by the organization to be a student rather than an employee during the field placement hours and the field site otherwise meets all requirements for the WSU Social Work Practicum. The practicum student receiving a stipend must have a reduced and different workload compared to regular employees doing similar work and must be provided with levels of support and supervision appropriate to and required of their status as students.

## **Readiness for Field**

Students admitted to the MSW Program will generally be considered to be ready to enter the field at the scheduled time for their chosen sequence of study. Social work faculty recognize 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 Program and the Field Education 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.

Common examples of reasons for delaying a student's entrance into field include the following:

- The need to gain a stronger foundation in general academic knowledge or skills, such as the ability to write clearly and grammatically, to communicate a general level of understanding of social work knowledge, values, and skills as well as cognitive and affective processes that include the student's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment in regard to unique practice situations.
- Identified concerns(s) in the student's ability to form relationships, communicate effectively, professionally, and/or in a timely manner, work collaboratively with diverse clients and communities; show respect for the opinions, beliefs, and cultural practices of others; demonstrate self-awareness, self-reflection, appropriate professional boundaries, and self-control; and seek assistance when difficult life circumstances interfere with his/her ability to meet program requirements.
- Two unsuccessful pre-placement interviews as a result of either (1) the student rejecting the placement(s) or (2) agency feedback demonstrates strong concern in an area(s) related to social work standards and/or any of the areas discussed above.

Delayed placement may also be considered if the student demonstrates patterns of behavior that would be unacceptable in a professional setting, such as numerous unexplained absences from class, a pattern of coming to class late or unprepared, repeatedly turning in unacceptable or late assignments, unprofessional and/or disrespectful communication or behavior, having been observed

by a faculty or staff member behaving in a significantly inappropriate way (for example, verbally or physically assaulting a classmate, faculty, or staff or coming to class intoxicated), or demonstrating contempt for or resistance to the accepted values, ethics, and/or practices of the social work profession.

Students who are concerned that they may have personal challenges and/or history that could affect their work with certain clients, have a criminal history, students who may be negatively affected by alcohol and/or other drug use, and students who are experiencing serious mental health challenges, are strongly encouraged to discuss their situation with the Field Education Director, as soon as possible in order to identify an appropriate course of action and to determine their readiness for field.

If a decision is made to delay a student's entry to field, the specific reason(s) for the delay in completing an internship as scheduled will be discussed with the student and provided in writing by Field Education Staff. Depending on the specific reasons for the delay, the student may be referred to the MSW Program Director or to the MSW Program Committee for consideration of referral to the Academic Review Committee (ARC) for further consideration of the student's status in the program. No further action related to the field placement process will occur after referral to the MSW Program Director or MSW Program Committee.

### **Agency-specific Requirements, Dual Relationships, and Conflicts of Interest**

Most organizations are required to perform national and/or criminal background (CORI), fingerprinting, and/or Sex Offender Registry checks before accepting students for an internship. In addition, Protective Service agencies will check to see if student applicants have histories of involvement with Protective Services. Some organizations may have additional requirements regarding medical clearances, immunizations, drug screens, or fingerprinting prior to acceptance. The results of any and all of these agency-specific requirements may result in a student not being accepted for a placement. While some organizations absorb the cost of these various requirements, students should be prepared to be responsible for those costs depending on the organization/internship site.

Many placements include requirements for outreach and travel to client homes or other locations and/or may require paying for parking, tolls, etc. In almost all circumstances, students should be prepared to utilize their own transportation and absorb any travel costs.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss any circumstances that may disqualify them for certain placements with a member of the field education staff so that appropriate placement assignments may be made. Students may not be placed in settings where dual relationships exist (i.e. family members and/or close personal and business associates are currently employed; student and/or family member is a client at the setting). Students with questions about whether or not a specific situation involves a dual relationship or a conflict of interest should discuss their specific situation with their assigned field education staff. Also, dual relationships, conflicts of interest, and/or any status change (i.e. CORI, protective services involvement, medical issues) that develop during the course of the field placement process must be discussed immediately with the field education staff. Status changes that occur during a field placement and could possibly affect a student's status within that field placement must be immediately discussed with the student's field faculty liaison.

## **Interview Process**

When a student has received a potential field placement assignment from a field education staff, she/he is responsible for contacting the site within two business days to set up an interview, unless directed otherwise. (Some organizations require additional application processes and/or written references prior to interviewing.) It is also strongly recommended that students review the phone message they have recorded on cell phones and answering machines and consider, if necessary and/or recommended by field education staff, revising it to accommodate professional communications. If contact may occur through email, students are expected to utilize their WSU email address. If circumstances arise that for some rare reason it is necessary for a student to utilize a personal email address, the student should also review and, if necessary and/or recommended by field education staff, change the personal email addresses to accommodate professional communications.

To prepare for a pre-placement interview, students should attempt to find out as much as possible about the potential organization. Most organizations have websites that often have valuable information about its mission and services. Students should be prepared to answer questions about why they want to be a social worker; why they wish to do their practicum at that particular site; what skills or experiences (personal strengths, coursework, employment or volunteer work) they will bring to the field; their learning goals, their long-term professional goals, and their availability to complete the placement. Many MSW students are also working professionals and will want to pay close attention to the balance of sharing previous skills/experience with demonstrating the readiness to be a student, a learner, during the field placement.

Under no circumstances should a student discuss alternative field placement schedules that have not been previously discussed with field education staff prior to the interview (i.e. requesting evening/weekend/irregular hours if this has not been clearly agreed upon prior to the interview).

Since the student is also evaluating the organization as a possible field placement site, the student should come to the interview prepared to *ask* as well as *answer* questions. Asking thoughtful questions about services and policies will convey to the organization's representatives that the student is prepared and genuinely interested in the placement. Interviews may occur in person, video conferencing, or by phone. In any case, students should plan to be available for the interview early, in professional attire, and be enthusiastic. Students should not offer unsolicited personal information or answer any personal questions that seem inappropriate. Field education staff provides students' résumés to the agency. However, if an interview is in person, **students should take additional copies of their resumes to the interview**. Students should also review the *MSW Program Manual* and *Field Manual* prior to their interview.

It is strongly recommended that students follow up an interview with a brief note thanking the interviewer for his/her time. **Students are responsible for contacting field education staff within two business days after the interview to discuss their impressions, interests, and the status of the interview.** Students who are considering the possibility not to pursue a placement where they have been interviewed should discuss this with their assigned field education staff *prior* to any discussion with the field site. Depending on the circumstances, field education staff may discuss the pros and cons of the placement further with the student before reaching a decision. Field education

staff will decide how notification to the agency will be made if the ultimate decision is not to pursue the placement.

Students who accept (and are accepted by) a field site should provide the site representative with contact information for the summer months. Students who do not hear back from the agency representative or are unclear about whether or not they have been accepted should *call to clarify their status* or contact their assigned field education staff for guidance. After both the student and the field site have accepted a placement, the student must notify the field education staff within two business days so that an official letter of confirmation may be sent to all involved parties to formalize the placement. The student may *not* consider a placement finalized until receiving formal notification from the field education office.

If the interview process does not result in a confirmed placement, field education staff may require a meeting with the student to explore what transpired, to assess the student's strengths and resources, and to determine additional steps. Possibilities include the following: the student may be offered feedback from the field site regarding apparent readiness for field education, asked to role-play interviewing skills, or helped to select other placement possibilities that build more closely on past successful experiences. Both students and field sites have the right to decline a placement. However, students who are considering rejecting a placement are strongly encouraged to first consider the policies, procedure, and educational goals of the program and other alternatives before making a decision.

As discussed above under "Readiness for Field", concerns about a student's readiness may occur *at any point in the field placement process*, including during pre-placement interviews. Students who have two unsuccessful pre-placement interviews as a result of either (1) the student rejecting the placement(s) or (2) agency feedback demonstrates strong concern in an area(s) related to social work standards and/or any of the areas discussed above, will be referred to the MSW Program Director or MSW Program Committee for consideration of an ARC referral depending on the circumstance. No further action related to the field placement process will occur after this referral.

### **Follow Up After Placement Acceptance**

All students should discuss possible work hours, start dates, and any on-boarding requirements with the field site representative within the first week after a placement has been formalized. Specific information regarding field placement hours and start dates is provided in Section V of this manual (Responsibilities of the Student). Students are expected to call or write the field site representative *again* in early to mid-August to confirm their current contact information, and the start date of their practicum. While not frequent, placements sometimes change when, for example, a staff person goes on medical leave or accepts another position. In the event that any aspect of the plan becomes unclear or confusing at this or at any other point in this process, students should contact the Field Education Program immediately for assistance.



### **III: CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF FIELD SITES AND FIELD INSTRUCTORS**

#### **Selection and Responsibilities of Field Placement Sites**

Field placement experiences occur in a variety of settings across New England. These include health, educational, criminal justice, mental health and a wide range of other settings where generalist and advanced clinical practice can be learned and applied. Students may work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities and governmental and non-governmental entities. Students have the opportunity to work with many diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The Social Work Department at Westfield State University partners with organizations and programs that are in alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics, provide a range of learning opportunities, and demonstrate commitment to student education by offering the skills, time, and knowledge of their staff to social work students. Specific criteria used in the selection of agencies are as follows:

- The organization must be interested in, and committed to, professional education and the application of research-based knowledge.
- The organization's policies are consistent with accepted ethical standards for the human services and with the pedagogical goals of Westfield State University's Social Work Program.
- The organization accepts students without regard to race, color, creed, national or ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, or veteran's status, except in those special circumstances permitted or mandated by law.
- The organization has clearly defined professional standards for social work services and practices and, if it is not primarily a social work agency, makes clear to the student throughout the placement how social work services are integrated with, and affected by, the work of other professionals within the organization.
- The organization provides field instructors (site supervisors) who have strong practice skills, are able to plan and implement structured learning experiences that help students integrate classroom and experiential learning, have demonstrated commitment to their own professional development, and have had prior supervisory experience or will have access to experienced supervisors who will assist them in developing their supervisory skills.
- The organization allows the field instructor sufficient time to respond to the student's need for direction, including at least one hour per week of uninterrupted face-to-face time for formal supervision, to review and evaluate the student's written work, and to participate in field-related meetings and conferences. As necessary and approved by the Field Education Program, video conferencing will also meet the requirement for face-to-face supervision.

- The organization offers the student the opportunity to attend staff and in-service training meetings relevant to their field placement.
- The organization provides the student with an opportunity to work with diverse client populations.
- The organization provides adequate safe working space and other resources as needed by the student for the performance of field assignments. If the organization requires that the student conduct professional business using a computer, a computer should be made available to the student for use during the agreed-upon placement hours. Field sites may not require students to bring personal computers to the site for use in completing professional business.
- As required by federal, state, and/or local law or ordinance, field placement sites, as a whole, should be accessible to students with disabilities. The “as a whole” requirement means that students with disabilities should have the same kinds of educational opportunities - including field instruction in particular kinds of settings - as students without disabilities. However, it is understood that it is not likely that every placement site will have the capacity to accommodate every student. It may not be feasible, for example, for a site to accommodate students who use wheelchairs because of the site’s location and existing architecture, but the same site might accommodate students with visual or hearing impairments. Every effort is made by the WSU Social Work Field Education Program to ensure equal access to fieldwork opportunities.
- The organization and/or field instructor must include, as part of the field placement orientation and as appropriate throughout the placement, a review of all organization policies, practices, and protocols related to personal safety for staff, students, and clients, including information about any possible dangers associated with field assignments and with specific guidelines for safety and risk management specific to the agency's client populations, methods of intervention (i.e., infection control policies and procedures, approved methods for restraint, etc.), and practice settings (i.e., home visits, travel through high-risk areas, etc.).
- The organization is willing to participate in a mutual evaluation process involving the field site, student and social work program to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the experience for the student as well as the compatibility of the experience with program objectives.
- The organization enters into a formal agreement with the WSU Social Work Program that clearly identifies the responsibilities of both parties. The document, known as an Affiliation Agreement, is signed by the WSU Field Education Director and an authorized representative of the organization.

### **Selection and Responsibilities of Field Instructors**

The field instructor plays a pivotal role in the development of a student’s skills and professional identity. In considering potential field instructors, the Social Work Program at WSU looks in general for demonstrated professional competence, the capacity to consciously explicate the concepts

and principles that underlie social work practice, a strong commitment to the values and ethics of Social Work, and a motivation to contribute to the preparation of the next generation of social workers.

Additional, more specific, criteria for and responsibilities of WSU Social Work Program field instructors include:

- Field instructors hold a Master's Degree in Social Work from an accredited school of social work and have two years post degree social work experience.
  - Massachusetts State Regulations also require that field instructors hold a license to practice social work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) or Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) or be exempt from such license (*if employed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and exempt or employed out of state*). WSU prefers that field instructors of students in an advanced year placement have an LICSW (*or be eligible for such license or the equivalent in another state*).
- A field instructor who does not meet the above criteria may be considered if (1) the field instructor is able to meet a specific student's learning goals, (2) no masters level social work instructor with a CSWE-accredited social work degree and comparable level of skill in the same area of practice is available, and (3) the Field Education Director determines that the placement setting meets all other criteria for a field placement site. In such cases, the WSU Field Education Program will develop an individualized plan to reinforce the social work perspective throughout the placement. At a minimum, the plan will include additional consultation between the field instructor and the student's faculty field liaison and/or an off-site licensed MSW. The student's faculty field liaison will be responsible for coordination, documentation, and evaluation of the plan to ensure educational outcomes.
- The WSU Social Work Program expects that field instructors adhere to the highest standards of professional ethics and values as detailed in the NASW Code of Ethics.
- Field instructors demonstrate a commitment to further professional development as a field instructor, including:
  - Participation, when possible, in WSU field orientations, trainings, and events.
  - New Field Instructors are expected to complete (or provide evidence of having completed) a Seminar in Field Instruction (SIFI). Consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring field instructor training and competence or waiving of the SIFI requirement.
- Field instructors are expected to support the specific educational goals of the MSW Program at Westfield State University, including its commitment to competency-based education, evidence-based practice and social and economic justice and to plan and coordinate learning experiences that are consistent with the Social Work Program's requirements and the student's learning objectives.

- Field instructors commit to providing continuity of supervision and evaluation throughout the practicum year, including
  - personally providing at least one hour of uninterrupted face-to-face supervision time weekly; As necessary and approved by the Field Education Program, video conferencing will also meet the requirement for face-to-face supervision;
  - assurance that a total of at least one additional hour of group and/or task-focused supervision is available to the student on a weekly basis;
  - communication and collaboration with the student's faculty field liaison regarding any concerns, needs, questions, etc.;
  - participation in a field site visit with the faculty field liaison and the student at least once each semester and other times as requested;
  - completion of evaluation forms, hours/activity logs, and other reports requested by the Social Work Program on a timely basis;
  - notification to the Field Education Director in advance of any staffing changes that may affect the student's supervisory relationships.
  
- Field instructors ensure that students are oriented to the agency's facilities, services, populations served, policies, and procedures. Particular attention is given to ensure that students are provided with information about any possible dangers associated with field assignments and with guidelines for safety and risk management specific to the agency's client populations, methods of intervention (i.e., infection control procedures, approved methods for restraint, etc.), and practice settings (i.e., home visits, travel through high-risk areas, etc.) and make every effort to ensure students' safety over the course of the field placement.

#### **IV: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

The Social Work Department at Westfield State University is committed to providing high quality Masters in Social Work education. Specific policies, procedures, and practices that demonstrate this commitment are described in additional detail throughout this manual and/or the MSW Program Manual. As part of the commitment to high quality MSW education, the Social Work Department provides a Field Education Program, managed by the Field Education Director, to specifically focus on the field education process. The following areas specific to field education are included in the Field Education Program:

- Regular and ongoing communication and collaboration with existing and potential field placement sites to explore and clarify the organization's interests and needs and the Program's expectations and requirements;
- Collaboration with students to identify a field placement site that will meet students' educational needs, satisfy the requirements of the Social Work Department, and consider the student's personal and professional goals;
- Guidance and assistance to students in the application and interviewing process with identified field placement sites;
- Communication and collaboration with potential field sites regarding pertinent and permissible information about student applicants and confirming the status of the application/interview process;
- Coordination and completion of all required documentation to confirm field placements;
- Providing a Field Education Manual that serves as a guideline and reference for students, field instructors, and faculty field liaisons;
- Offering a structured orientation for field instructors at the beginning of each academic year that includes information about the objectives and requirements of the Social Work Program and the Social Work Field Placements; the components, sequencing, and content of the social work curriculum; and strategies for supervising students at the Masters level;
- Offering a face-to-face and/or online Supervision in Field Instruction (SIFI) course for field instructors who have not completed field instructor training and allowing field instructors to complete or seek credit for a SIFI course offered by any other accredited MSW Program in New England; (consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring field instructor training and competence or waiving of the SIFI requirement);
- Availability of online resources for field instructors, including field syllabi, program handbooks and related evaluation tools and forms; contact information for and email links to the Field Education Director, Program Director, faculty field liaisons, and, with their permission, other field instructors;
- Availability of no-cost or low-cost Continuing Education Units for field instructors by participating in educational programs and events offered by the WSU Social Work Program and/or in conjunction with the New England Field Education Consortium (NECON);
- Providing Field Faculty Liaisons who carry multiple responsibilities, including the instructor role for the integrative field seminar and ongoing collaborative and supportive communication between the student, the field site/field instructor, and Field Education Program. FFLs should refer to the "Faculty Field Liaisons (FFL) – Best Practice and Guidelines" document for

specific responsibilities. This document is provided to FFLs at the beginning of each academic year.

- Conducting a weekly synchronous and/or asynchronous Integrative Field Seminar for all students in field placement and facilitated by the FFL, that
  - utilizes structured assignments, group discussions, process recordings, integrative journals, and case consultations as learning tools and requires students to directly apply these concepts in their social work practice;
  - provides ongoing opportunities for students to compare field experiences and discuss concerns, and experiential exercises that will assist students in integrating classroom and experiential knowledge, acquiring and strengthening skills, exploring personal and professional values and ethics and present and discuss clinical case material in a way that promotes learning and reflection and protects client confidentiality;
- Ensuring that students are provided with ethical guidelines for practice, including detailed information about the protection of client confidentiality and compliance with relevant HIPAA regulations;
- Incorporating classroom and seminar content and discussion of policies, practices, and strategies related to personal safety for students in the field, including information about possible dangers associated with specific client populations, methods of intervention, and practice settings, and working collaboratively with field sites to ensure student safety in field placements;
- Monitoring the quality of the learning experience by regularly soliciting formal and informal evaluations from and about students, field instructors, and faculty field liaisons;
- Providing regular means of communication between the Field Education Program, Faculty Field Liaisons, Social Work Department and field instructors;
- Development, distribution, and maintenance of appropriate field-related forms and documents, including any necessary training of students, faculty, and field instructors.

## **V. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT DURING THE FIELD PRACTICUM**

The student, with the support of the faculty field liaison and the field instructor, has significant responsibility for his/her own learning and is expected to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of the field practicum experience. Specific expectations of students during the field application and interview process are discussed in detail in Section II of this manual (Policies and Procedures for the Field Education Placement Process). The following details student responsibilities for participating in field practicum.

## **Guidelines for Professional Behavior in the Field**

Students are expected to demonstrate professional behavior at all times while they are in the field. Common examples of professional behavior include maintaining an agreed upon schedule, arrival and departure at the agreed upon time, contacting the field site as soon as possible if they need to be absent, and following a written agreement for making up missed time. Students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the values and ethics of the social work profession and with local, state, and national laws. A copy of the current NASW *Code of Ethics* is provided in the MSW Program Manual.

Students should dress in a manner consistent with practice at the field site, but should never dress more casually than the *majority* of the staff at the site. Extremely casual attire, such as jeans, tank tops, and casual t-shirts, are rarely appropriate for students, except possibly when engaging in field trips or play activities with clients and only with prior guidance and approval from the field instructor. Students should demonstrate an understanding that professional dress communicates respect for clients and promotes trust in the worker's professionalism. Students must not dress in ways that might reasonably be viewed as sexually provocative or offensive by clients or agency staff and/or may reflect negatively on the student, the organization, or the Social Work Department's professional image. Appropriate attire is expected whether the student is in-person at the field site or engaging in video conferencing or other visible remote activity.

Students must follow NASW guidelines for dual relationships and other inappropriate behaviors with clients. It is also important that students take great care in monitoring and maintaining professional relationships with field site staff. Concerns, questions, and/or changes related to relationships and boundaries with clients and staff should be discussed as soon as possible with the field instructor and/or the faculty liaison.

## **Field Placement Hours**

The required number of hours for each field placement is described in detail in Section I of this manual as part of the discussion of the field practicum courses. It is recommended that, prior to the start of the practicum, the student develop, in consultation with the field instructor, a full schedule of hours, week by week, for the full field placement from September to May. The following provides considerations for schedule planning as well as examples of activities that are generally considered part of the field placement experience and included in placement hours. Students should consult their faculty field liaison with any questions about whether a specific activity is considered part of the field placement.

- Generally, students begin field placement during the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September. The second semester of field placement is usually completed in early May, and not earlier than May 1<sup>st</sup>. The schedule for field placement is designed to establish an overall practicum experience of sufficient length to provide time for professional growth and development over the field placement period and to coincide with the academic year along with the duration of concurrent practice courses and integrative field seminar in each semester. Requests for earlier or later start or finish dates may be considered under unique circumstances, but must have prior approval from the Field Education Director and will only be granted based on specific need and considerations within the Social Work Department and field placement site.

- 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.
- Orientation, direct client service, supervision, “shadowing” of other staff, activities assigned by the field instructor, completion of required process recordings, record keeping, staff meetings, attendance at field site-sponsored seminars, workshops, or other organization in-service training, are considered part of the practicum experience and are included in field practicum hours. With agency and supervisor approval, attendance at conferences or other training not directly sponsored by the field site may be allowed as part of the practicum.
- School holidays, agency holidays, lunch time, commuting time to and from the student's practicum site, or other activities not required by the practicum site are not included as practicum hours.
- Participation in the weekly integrative field seminar is required of all field students as part of the overall field practicum course.
- Occasionally, due to illness, an unavoidable delay in the start of practicum, or other reasons, students fall behind in their field hours and may not complete the required number of hours by the end of a semester of practicum. If this happens at the end of a semester, the student may receive a grade of "Incomplete" (I) for that semester of practicum until the required hours are completed. Both the field instructor and faculty field liaison must approve a specific plan for completion.
- Students are required to complete Field Placement Hours Timesheets that are electronically signed by both the student and the field instructor and reviewed by the faculty field liaison on a regular basis. Field Placement Hours Timesheets are located on the SOCW Field Docs (IPT) web-based system. Students will receive instruction in completion of the Timesheets during the first weeks of the integrative field seminar.
- Students may not receive a grade for the field practicum until all required field placement hours as well as the field evaluation form are completed, documented, and approved.

### **Use of Field Site Material and Confidentiality**

Students are responsible for assuring clarity and confidentiality with regard to the use of any field site materials (i.e. agency forms) for course or field assignments and should discuss any questions with their field instructor and/or faculty field liaison prior to the use of such material. Students may not remove official field site documents and/or materials (i.e. client charts) containing client information from the field placement site for any reason. Students are responsible for following all field site policies regarding the use of electronic health records and any other confidential client information.



Students are expected to develop and demonstrate a working understanding of specific field site policies and procedures regarding client confidentiality. In general, clients should not be discussed in the presence of anyone (including field site employees) who is not directly involved with the case, except in formal case conferences or supervision. Students should never discuss any potentially identifying details of cases with other students, friends, family members, and/or intimate partners. The same adherence to confidentiality is expected in all settings, including if the student is providing services or any other related activity remotely. Actual client names or any other potentially identifying information may not be used in students' process recordings, journals, course notebooks, papers, seminar discussions, etc. Students who violate these confidentiality rules may be dismissed from the field and/or referred to the Academic Review Committee (ARC).

### **The Learning Agreement**

The Learning Agreement Template is located on SOCW Field Docs (IPT). Students will receive instruction on completion of the Learning Agreement during the first few weeks of the integrative field seminar and are expected to complete an electronic draft no later than the end of their fifth week of field placement. This document should reflect the student's goals for the field placement experience, the agency's expectations, and the Social Work Department's requirements. The Learning Agreement will be drafted by the student in collaboration with the field instructor, and reviewed by the faculty liaison. The student, the field instructor, and the faculty field liaison must electronically sign the completed Learning Agreement. The Learning Agreement will become the basis for the evaluation process. Copies of the student's Learning Agreements are retained in the student's permanent record to assist faculty in describing the student's field experience in recommendations and letters of reference.

### **Use of Supervision**

Field site staff that supervise students are called field instructors or field supervisors. Although more than one person at a field site may guide and/or supervise students, every student is assigned a primary field instructor and is expected to meet at least once a week face-to-face for a minimum of one hour with the primary field instructor. As previously stated, when necessary and approved, video conferencing will be considered as face-to-face supervision. Students should come to supervisory sessions prepared to discuss specific field-related issues, cases, concerns, or questions. As part of the integration of classroom and field experiences, students are also expected to share with the field instructor course materials and syllabi in addition to appropriate classroom discussions and experiences.

An additional hour of task-oriented and/or group supervision per week is also required and may be provided either directly by the primary field instructor or by field site staff assigned by the primary field instructor. An appropriately trained staff member who may or may not have an MSW may provide this additional supervision.

## **VI. Evaluation of Field Education**

Evaluation is a semester-long process that actively involves the student, the field instructor, and the faculty field liaison. Integrative seminar instructors/faculty liaisons monitor the student's placement through regular seminar discussion and individual communication with the student and with concurrent review of the student's practicum timesheets, process recordings, and other written work. The faculty field liaison will also provide the field instructor with several means of making contact throughout the internship and encourage regular communication and collaboration.

### **Identification and Resolution of Difficulties that Arise in the Field**

Difficulties in Field Placement may be first identified by the student, field instructor, or faculty field liaison. All parties are encouraged to collaborate in efforts to resolve the difficulties and improve the overall field performance and experience.

Field Instructors who have any concerns regarding any aspect of the student's performance are strongly encouraged to communicate with the faculty field liaison if efforts directly with the student have not been successful and/or the field instructor deems the problem more serious and requiring immediate action. Very often, collaboration between the field instructor and the faculty field liaison and/or the combined efforts of the field instructor, faculty field liaison, and the student result in improved performance. Field instructors who feel the nature of the concern does not allow communication with the faculty field liaison are expected to contact the Field Education Director, who will intervene as required.

Students are expected to notify the faculty field liaison as soon as possible if difficulties within the field placement, with the field instructor, and/or other agency staff arise. This includes difficulties first experienced and identified by the student or difficulties the student has been made aware of by the field instructor and/or other agency staff. Students who are experiencing difficulty in the field should utilize the following process:

1. Attempt to resolve the difficulties with the assistance of the field instructor at the field site. Depending on the difficulty, this step may involve the field instructor coaching the student in ways to attempt to resolve the problem him/herself, as problem solving and self-advocacy are an important part of the student's education. If this does not resolve the problem or the student feels unable to discuss the difficulty with the field instructor, the student should:
2. Request assistance from the faculty field liaison in a timely manner. In most cases, difficulties can be resolved through the combined efforts of the student, the faculty field liaison, and the field instructor. If the resolution involves an ongoing process or is of a serious nature, the faculty field liaison is expected to develop a written plan with the student, including the specific identified concerns, a plan for improvement, a timeline for resolution of the difficulties and identification of possible consequences for failure to correct the problem. Due to the nature of most field-related problems, the faculty field liaison may need to work closely with the field instructor in the development and monitoring the plan. The faculty field liaison may also request assistance and/or consult with field education program staff at any time. If

the difficulty is not resolved in this manner and/or the faculty field liaison determines the problem/concern is of a more serious nature requiring further action:

3. The Field Education Director should be informed (*by the student and/or faculty liaison and/or field instructor as appropriate*) and may, after investigation, consider resolutions up to and including adjustments to and/or change of placement, probation status for field, or removal of the student from the field. If the student is asked to leave the placement by the field site and/or the Field Education Director removes the student from the field site, the Field Education Director will request review by the MSW Program Committee. The MSW Program Committee may recommend a plan of action and/or refer the student to ARC (*process detailed in the MSW Program Manual*).

In situations other than removal from the field placement and if the student, field instructor, faculty field liaison, and Field Education Director cannot agree on an appropriate course of action or consider the problem/concern of a more serious nature requiring further action, the Field Education Director will request review by the MSW Program Committee. The MSW Program Committee may recommend a plan of action and/or refer the student to ARC.

4. If a student feels he or she was unfairly treated during the above process, he/she has the right to have his/her situation reviewed through the University's academic appeals process.

### **Probation/Dismissal Policies for Students in the Field**

Since Social Work field placements are considered an essential component of the social work student's academic preparation for social work practice, all reasons for being placed on probation or for being dismissed from the program, including unsatisfactory performance in the field, are considered to be academic reasons. Student behaviors that may result in probation and/or dismissal from the field and/or the program, and the student's rights during the processes of ameliorating problems, establishing probationary conditions, and dismissal, are described as follows:

#### **Examples of student behaviors that may result in probationary status in field:**

- A pattern of resistance to field site assignments and policies, insofar as those assignments and policies do not conflict with ethical standards for professional social work.
- Failure to comply with the agreed upon schedule for the field placement, except in the case of illness, emergency, or the death of someone in student's personal support system. In those exceptions, students must notify the field site and faculty field liaison as soon as possible of the need for absence.
- Failure to notify the field instructor and, if appropriate, scheduled clients, within a reasonable time prior to any unscheduled absence.

- A pattern of arriving late and/or leaving early from the field placement.
- Failure to attend supervision on a weekly basis and/or failure to use supervision to discuss field-related issues.
- Use of field placement time for work that is not field-related and/or not agreed upon with the field instructor.
- Failure to demonstrate active engagement in the learning process.
- Other patterns of behavior that are of mutual concern to the field instructor and faculty liaison.

Examples of student behaviors that may result in dismissal from the field:

- Serious or repeated violation of social work ethics as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics.
- Breaking a law in an agency-related matter or conviction of a felony during the practicum year. *(If it is discovered while the student is in the field that the student has failed to disclose a prior criminal conviction or open criminal case at the time of application or a conviction that occurs during the placement, this may also be considered grounds for dismissal.)*
- Evidence of chemical dependence or substance abuse while enrolled in the social work program.
- A serious breach of a field site's policy.
- Falsifying time sheets or other field placement records or reports.
- A consistently resistant or hostile attitude toward learning or supervision.
- An unwillingness or inability to carry out appropriate assignments in the field placement.
- Behavior that is emotionally or physically dangerous to agency clients, staff, or other students.
- Failure to achieve a passing grade in the Social Work Practicum.

Student rights and responsibilities concerning probationary status in field and/or dismissal from field are discussed earlier in this section of the manual under **Identification and Resolution of Difficulties that Arise in the Field.** Additional information is also provided in the MSW Program Manual.

### **Evaluation of the Student by the Field Instructor**

Students and field instructors will be provided with information early in the practicum about the formal evaluation and submission process. In addition to the formal evaluation form completed electronically by both the field instructor and the student and the evaluative element of the mid-semester site visit, the faculty liaison will assist the student and field instructor in evaluating the student's progress towards meeting the specific learning goals that the student had identified in his or her *Learning Agreement*. The student's field instructor will complete a formal written evaluation at the end of each semester in the field. The student should have the opportunity to discuss the content and then read and sign the evaluative materials written by the field instructor before they are submitted to the Faculty Liaison and ultimately the Social Work Program. The student's signature does not mean that the student and the instructor are necessarily in agreement about its content but rather that the student has had an opportunity to read and discuss the evaluation report with the instructor. Students have the right to submit an electronic addendum or rebuttal within the evaluation form, that can be viewed by the field instructor and faculty field liaison if differences have not been resolved through discussion. All evaluations are expected by the dates specified in the Field Education Calendar. These evaluation forms will become part of the student's permanent record.

### **Evaluation of the Field Experience by the Student**

Students complete a self-evaluation as part of the formal end of each semester evaluation process. Students will also have informal opportunities to provide feedback about the field placement throughout their time in the field. Students will also be provided with formal opportunities to verbally evaluate various aspects of the placement experience at the once-a-semester liaison visits. Formal written feedback about the placement experience may be solicited from the student at or before the end of the second semester of the placement and will be kept in confidential agency records by the field office.

### **Evaluation of the Field Experience by the Field Instructor**

Field instructors will be provided with informal opportunities to provide feedback about the field experience to the faculty field liaison throughout the course of the placement. Field instructors will also be provided with formal opportunities to verbally evaluate various aspects of the field experience at the once-a-semester liaison visits and are also encouraged to contact the faculty field liaison and/or the Field Education Director at any time to discuss their experience with the field placement or the Social Work Program. Formal written feedback about the placement experience may be solicited from the field instructor at or before the end of the second semester of the placement and will be kept in confidential records by the field office.

### **Practicum Course Grade Assignment**

The faculty field liaison is responsible for the student's final grade assignment for the field practicum course after considering all assessments utilized during the practicum, including, but not limited to, the field instructor's evaluation, the student's self-evaluation, student's performance in the integrative field seminar, and the student's completion of required placement hours.

## **VII. Additional Policies and Procedures**

### **Malpractice and Liability**

While still quite rare, lawsuits against social service agencies and colleges and universities have become more common in recent years. Students need to be aware that they may be sued individually or become involved in lawsuits against entire agencies or programs. The University also may be held liable for student misbehavior or malpractice in the field or for any perceived failure on the part of program faculty to provide the student with sufficient information, training, or appropriate protection of client well-being and confidentiality.

As an agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Westfield State University maintains, for each student and designated faculty member, professional liability insurance coverage in the minimum amount of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per person and three million dollars (\$3,000,000) in the aggregate. Westfield State University will furnish evidence of such coverage on an annual basis as requested.

Students are strongly encouraged to also purchase private malpractice insurance to cover potential liability in the case of legal action involving them individually and/or as a party to legal action against an agency or program. Low-cost student malpractice insurance for students who are NASW members is currently available from NASW. The Field Education Director may also have information about other insurance options.

Students can limit their own risk and liability by developing a solid understanding of the NASW *Code of Ethics* and with the policies and expectations of Westfield State University, the policies and expectations of the Social Work Program, as outlined in the Field Education Manual and MSW Program Manual, and the policies and procedures of the field site where they are completing their field placement.

Students who are concerned about the ethics of specific site practices or specific assignments, students who experience discrimination, and students who experience sexual or other forms of harassment from supervisors, agency staff, clients, fellow students, or University faculty or staff, are urged to bring these concerns to their field instructor and the Field Education Director (for internship related concerns), or to the MSW Program Director (for concerns that are not related to the internship) as soon as possible.

### **Travel**

Students are responsible for travel to and from their field site and for any associated costs for parking. If students will be expected to travel during field placement hours (i.e. outreach to client homes) this must be clearly discussed and agreed upon by the student and the authorized representative of the field site during the interview process, including whether or not the field site will provide reimbursement for travel expenses. Agreements between the student and field site for travel during

field placement hours must be included in the Learning Agreement. The WSU Social Work Program is not responsible for any costs incurred by the student and/or field site for student travel. In most circumstances, students should be prepared to assume all costs related to travel related to the field placement.

### **Transportation of Clients**

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 should not 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.* 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.

### **Student Membership in NASW**

All students are encouraged to join the National Association of Social Workers and will need to be NASW members to be eligible for NASW student malpractice insurance. Students who are members will gain access to a great deal of information about local social work events and state and national issues affecting social workers. This information is provided in the national and state publications that are mailed and/or emailed to the student and through access to the "members only" sections of the NASW website. Students may also gain access to information about available positions in social work through NASW publications and online resources. Applications for NASW membership and for NASW malpractice insurance are available on the NASW website ([www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)).

### **Field Advisory Board**

The Field Advisory Board (FAB) is chaired and convened by the Field Education Director and is additionally comprised of the Assistant Field Education Directors, a faculty member and community stakeholders. FAB provides consultation on the content and process of the components of field education and meets throughout the year for discussion and consequent recommendations related to field issues. The Board may initiate and/or respond to issues in areas such as student needs and concerns, agency and community needs and concerns, the current practice environment, integration of field experiences and curriculum, and field policies and procedures as well as any additional requests for consideration from the Field Program or Department of Social Work. Additionally, the Board may develop and complete specific projects for the purpose of supporting and making recommendations to the field program and/or the Department of Social Work.

### **Other Policies and Procedures**

Additional policies and procedures, including policies related to nondiscrimination and affirmative action, sexual harassment, hazing, religious holidays, grading, infectious disease standards, and leaves of absence, are described in the Westfield State University MSW Program Manual. Students are advised to develop working understanding of the specific information provided in the MSW Program Manual, a copy of which is available on the WSU Social Work website at

[www.westfield.ma.edu/socialwork](http://www.westfield.ma.edu/socialwork). Field instructors and other interested parties may request a copy of the manual and/or access the manual on the WSU Social Work website.