



FIELD EDUCATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

The following information provides a brief summary of the UNC-CH, School of Social Work's Field Education Program. The *UNC-CH, School of Social Work Curriculum Manual* and the *Field Education Program Manual* provide more extensive information.

1. What is the purpose of field education?

Field education is an integral part of both the Foundation and Advanced Curricula. While classroom learning focuses on discrete knowledge and theoretical background, the field curriculum exposes students to a wide range of problems and possibilities. It teaches students to assess these situations and to develop, implement, and evaluate social interventions for actual persons, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

2. What types of agencies are selected as field sites?

We are fortunate to have a wide range of cooperating agencies in over fifty NC counties. Each year more than 200 students are placed in a variety of agencies and programs. Most students complete their practicum in North Carolina, though increasingly students are requesting field placements in national and international settings. Placement sites represent the broad scope of social work practice in public and private, not-for-profit, and for-profit agencies. Typical practicum sites include Departments of Social Services, community providers of mental health services, substance abuse agencies, medical facilities such as hospitals and hospices, domestic violence agencies, homeless shelters and public schools. Students are also placed in agencies involved in program and policy development, advocacy, and regional and statewide planning such as local United Ways, private non-profit agencies, family resource centers, and others.

3. How does the School choose field instructors?

Field instructors are recruited by the School or recommended by agency personnel, other field instructors and our students. They are chosen because of their agency's support for social work education, their individual qualifications, and our need for particular types of student learning experiences. Among other criteria, field instructors are required to have an MSW degree and at least two years post-masters experience. Most have five or more years of practice experience. They must also be interested in serving as agency-based educators and need sufficient time to supervise a student. Exceptions to these criteria will be considered, on a case by case basis, depending on the opportunities available for the learning experience and according to program policies.

4. What kind of training is available to a practitioner who wishes to serve as a field instructor?

First time field instructors are asked to participate in **New Field Instructor's Training**. Each field instructor is assigned a **Field Advisor** from the School of Social Work who is available to interpret the School's goals and objectives and advocate for both the student and the field instructor. This training is offered in multiple locations every summer and on-line throughout the course of the year. Field instructors are also invited to participate in continuing education opportunities offered by the School.

5. Does the school pay field instructors to work with students?

No. Most field instructors tell us the greatest reward comes from helping others develop professional knowledge and skill. Though we can never fully compensate field instructors for the teaching they do, some of the direct benefits include: (a) AHEC Digital Library privileges; (b) an annual field instructors' workshop and luncheon; and (c) reduced or no cost admission to workshops sponsored by the School of Social Work when available. With permission of the instructor, field instructors may also audit social work classes if space is available.

6. How is the placement assignment determined?

Potential field instructors meet with an assigned field advisor who completes an **Agency Placement Information Form** which provides information about potential placement opportunities and field instructor education, experience, and interests. Field Instructors are also asked to provide us with a resume or vita. Students complete a **Practicum Planning Guide** which includes a résumé and statements about their interests and learning needs. The agency information is shared with students and used to develop preliminary matches.

Foundation (1st year) practicum placements are made by the Field Education Program faculty in consultation with students. Concentration (2nd year) practicum placements are also made by the Field Education Program faculty in consultation with the students. Unlike the Foundation students, however, Concentration students provide faculty with their top three preferences of specific agencies where they would like to be placed. When a final choice is made, the student is expected to arrange a pre-placement interview with the prospective field instructor. Students are only matched (and subsequently interview) at one agency at a time. By doing this we prevent students from competing with each other for placements and protect agencies from being inundated by students seeking interviews.

When placing foundation practicum students, we seek opportunities that will broaden their professional experience and address core knowledge in developing basic social work skills. In the foundation practicum students must engage in both direct and macro practice activities. Concentration practicum students gain a greater depth of skill and knowledge in their chosen area of special interest.

A **Memorandum of Agreement** between the School and cooperating field education agency should be signed before a student is officially placed. Copies of this agreement are on file in the Field Education Program Office.

7. What are the goals of the first (foundation) practicum?

The foundation placement is designed to help the student acquire and improve basic social work practice skills in work with individuals, families, and small groups (direct practice) as well as with work units, organizations, and communities (community, management and policy practice). Therefore students are

expected to carry a caseload where they can practice assessment, engagement, and intervention skills. They are also expected to participate in tasks that can improve a work unit, an organization or some aspect of the community. In both kinds of activities they should be able to demonstrate a beginning ability to evaluate their practice.

8. What are the goals of the second (concentration) practicum?

In their second year, students select a placement in their **area of concentration**. Students may choose the Direct Practice, Community, Management and Policy Practice or Self-Directed Concentration. In each area of concentration, students are expected to develop depth in social work practice knowledge and skills sufficient for competent, self-evaluative, accountable and ultimately autonomous practice.

9. What will the prospective field instructor know about the student before the pre-placement interview?

After a placement is recommended by the Field Education Program faculty, the student must have a pre-placement interview with the field instructor and any other relevant staff. A copy of the student's Practicum Planning Guide and résumé is sent to the prospective field instructor prior to the interview. In some cases prospective field instructors call the Field Education Program to clarify information or we may call a field instructor to discuss a student's special needs.

10. What is the purpose of the pre-placement interview?

The pre-placement interview gives the student and field instructor an opportunity to get acquainted and explore mutual expectations about the placement. The goal of this interview is to determine if the match of student/agency/field instructor is appropriate. It helps the student and field instructor clarify and adjust their expectations and prepare for the practicum experience. If the match of student and agency does not seem appropriate, the field instructor and the student should contact the Field Education Office immediately. A different placement option is then explored.

The placement assignment process is not complete until the potential Field instructor and the student have met and the Field Education Office receives confirmation from both parties.

11. What questions should be explored in the pre-placement interview?

The student and field instructor should discuss the nature of the practicum assignment including types of clients, activities, projects, services rendered and caseload size (if applicable). They should discuss how tasks will be assigned, especially during the first few weeks of the placement. The teaching style of the field instructor and learning style of the student is another topic to be explored. Also approaches to supervision should be discussed: when will weekly conferences be scheduled? Will other agency staff be involved? Does the field instructor expect the student to take the initiative in seeking help and how will the instructor routinely monitor the student's work? The student and field instructor should also discuss issues of protocol and the norms present in the field agency regarding dress, student space, level of formality in communication, confidentiality, correspondence and topics such as personal safety and health precautions, when applicable. Finally, the student and field instructor should share enough about their personalities and mutual expectations that they will be able to assess how they can work together most effectively.

12. How many credits do students receive for field?

Students receive three credits each for their first practicum (SoWo 520 & 521) and six credits each for their second (SoWo 820 & 821). First year students also attend a one credit, small group seminar that is related to their practicum experiences (SoWo 523 & 524).

Students complete four semesters of field unless they are advanced standing students, that is, students who have completed a BSW program. Advanced standing students complete three semesters, a six week summer block practicum (four days a week) and two concurrent practica (3 days a week) during the fall and spring semesters.

Normally students are in concurrent practica, that is, they are in classroom and field during the same week. Students are expected to work normal agency hours. Full time foundation students are in their field agencies **16 hours per week on Wednesdays and Thursdays** and full time concentration students complete **24 hours** of placement on **Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays** (except for University and agency holidays) unless a special schedule is arranged. Thus foundation students complete 60 days and concentration students complete 90 days in the field during the academic year.

Distance Education students in the Mountain Area, Winston-Salem, and Triangle Distance Education Programs complete the same number of field hours; however their placement schedules may vary from the above format.

By plan and special permission, students may also be placed in a block practicum. That is, they are in their field agency for four or five days a week for one semester or during the summer. A block placement can be completed after the foundation or concentration course work is completed. These are usually scheduled during the summer sessions for 60 or 90 days. See the *Field Education Program Manual* for specific guidelines.

13. Do students need to have a car?

Students are responsible for securing transportation to their field placements regardless of location. As there is limited public transportation in North Carolina, students must have access to transportation to reach their field placements. It is to the student's advantage to have a personal vehicle. Many of our local communities are small and have few resources for field placements; therefore, not having a personal vehicle will severely limit the field placement options.

Many field placements offer services that are community-based and the majority of fieldwork sites require the use of a vehicle for field work. This means that many field placements require students to have a car to perform field related tasks such as transporting clients, community outreach, home visits, community work, attending meetings, etc. When using a personal vehicle for required educational training that is authorized by the University, the student's personal automobile liability insurance is considered primary. The University's automobile liability insurance is only provided on a secondary basis.

Agencies are expected to reimburse students for mileage incurred when conducting agency business (not travel between the agency and the student's residence). However, students should inquire about this policy during the interview.

14. Do students need insurance?

The School of Social Work carries a blanket professional liability insurance policy for students. Coverage is limited to \$1,000,000/\$3,000,000. It is recommended that students also carry an automobile insurance policy if they will be using their car to carry out agency assignments (see above).

15. Can placements be completed in a student's employing agency?

Placements in employing agencies may be possible. The placement must differ significantly from the student's current or previous agency experience. Students will have a new field instructor and serve a different client population while learning new intervention methods. Specific guidelines are provided in the *Field Education Program Manual*.

16. How is the field practicum grade determined?

Grades are based on school criteria and student performance. See the *Field Education Program Manual* for specifics. This performance should be documented by a variety of means including direct observation, audio/video tapes, statistics, written records, and other products. Performance evaluations are completed at the end of each semester. Students may receive the following grades for field instruction: Pass (P), Low Pass (L), or Fail (F). The grade is assigned by the faculty advisor after consultation with the field instructor and discussions with the student. The student receives a separate grade for each semester of practicum.

17. What if the placement doesn't work?

Occasionally it is necessary to terminate placements due to agency, field instructor or student factors. Termination requires as much planning as placement. The student and field instructor should thoroughly discuss the need to terminate in consultation with the Field Education Program faculty. Students are not relieved of their field responsibilities without the approval of the Director of Field Education. See the *Field Education Program Manual* for specifics.

18. If someone wants to serve as a field instructor, what should they do?

Experienced MSWs interested in serving as field instructors should contact:

- **The UNC School of Social Work at Chapel Hill**

- **Field Education Program**

- 3335 Tate Turner Kuralt Building,
CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550;

919-966-4916

- Rebecca Brigham, MSW
Director of Field Education

- brigham@email.unc.edu

919-962-6532

- Jean Livermore, MSW, LCSW
Associate Director of Field Education

- jlivermo@email.unc.edu

919-962-6529

- Linda Pridgen-Braswell
Field Office Manager

- linda_pb@unc.edu

919-966-4916

- **Mountain Area Distance Education MSW Program**
Blue Ridge Community College Campus, Flat Rock, NC
Dayna Guido, MSW, LCSW
Program Director
Dayna.guido@gmail.com

828-251-5371

- **Winston-Salem Distance Education Advanced Standing MSW Program**
741 N Highland Ave, Winston-Salem NC 27101
Teresa Palmer, MSW, LCSW
W-S Field Education Coordinator
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336-703-3680