

EMPLOYER BASED FIELD PLACEMENTS

Field education is a critical component of a social work degree program, providing opportunities to integrate classroom knowledge and to practice social work in different settings. The experience is supervised by professional staff members of participating agencies. Employer based field placements may be developed for students to fulfill their field education requirements within their employing agency. The curriculum and objectives of an employer based placement are identical to those of a student in a non-employment placement. The primary purpose of a field placement is to provide students with educational opportunities that lead to competent social work practice. Therefore, an employer based field placement should not be viewed as a job but as a student learning experience that assists in the development of knowledge and skills that are transferable from one setting to another as well as an arena in which the student can develop a professional social work identity.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can a student do a field placement in his or her current place of employment?

Employer based field placements are one option that may be developed for students to fulfill their field education requirements while retaining a connection to their employing agency. Employer based field placements can provide students with the opportunity to continue employment with their agency while completing either their Foundation or Concentration Practicum. Field placement assignments must be educationally appropriate yet separate and distinct from their employment responsibilities. However, placement in a student's employing agency is the exception rather than the rule. An employer based field placement should not be viewed as a job but as the student's learning experience. It is possible only if the agency is in agreement and is willing and able to make programmatic accommodations to meet the student's learning needs. Students requesting approval for placement in their employing agency must submit an "Employer Based Placement Proposal."

2. What factors contribute to the success of an employer based placement?

Employer based placements are most readily developed in agencies supportive of social work education and workforce development. An agency serving as a successful employer based placement site generally has multiple functions or departments to better provide students with exposure to new learning in areas of the agency substantially different from the area in which the student is employed. Employer based placements also are more suitable for students whom the agency is committed to retaining; in turn, students generally have been employed with the agency for a significant length of time and have demonstrated their commitment to the agency.

3. Who needs to be involved in setting up an employer based placement?

Setting up placements in employing agencies requires more effort than placement in non-employing agencies. This extra attention is necessary to ensure that the planned placement experience meets all School requirements and learning objectives as well as to ensure that it does not duplicate current job tasks and responsibilities. Arrangement and approval of the placement plan requires involvement of the following individuals: Student/ employee, job supervisor, an agency executive, potential Field Instructor, Task Supervisor (if applicable), and Field Advisor from the School of Social Work. In most instances, a Field Advisor will visit the agency and meet with those listed above to determine if the proposed plan meets field placement requirements and to answer any questions. The Field Education Director grants final approval of employer based placements on a case-by-case basis.

4. What are the benefits of an employer based field placement?

The student/ employee already knows and is oriented to the agency so the general learning curve may be less steep initially. The student/ employee also brings new learning back to the agency, which can enhance agency practice. The agency demonstrates its commitment to employees' professional development and education. The agency also retains a quality employee and protects its investment in the employee.

5. What are the challenges of an employer based field placement:

It can be difficult to separate student and employee roles, both for the student and for other staff within the agency. It also can be challenging to ensure appropriate division of work load to accommodate student learning activities. As a result, the student role may be forgotten at times. The student/ employee's work colleagues also may feel confused or even resentful of the employee in a student role. In addition, the student/ employee may have access to agency leadership, meetings, and information that they themselves in past roles or others in the agency currently may not be privy to, and therefore may create a sensitive situation.

6. What is the process for obtaining an employer based placement?

There is no guarantee that an employer based placement will be approved. The student must electronically complete an Employer Based Placement Proposal and review it with his or her employer (i.e., the job supervisor, an agency executive, Field Instructor, and Task Supervisor, if applicable). It is then reviewed and verbally approved by the Field Advisor and Field Education Director. Once a final version is agreed upon, a hard copy of the proposal is printed and signed by all parties. It is the student's responsibility to obtain these signatures and return them to the Field Advisor. A signed copy is kept on file by the School of Social Work. This signed proposal must be submitted to the School prior to the start of the field placement.

7. What must be included in the employer based proposal?

It is the responsibility of the student to submit a proposal that meets the following criteria:

- Designated field placement activities which meet the educational goals and outcomes appropriate for the student's program (i.e., Foundation, Direct Practice, Management & Community Practice, or Self-Directed).
- Affirmation that the student is not a probationary employee (or that probation has been waived by the agency) and is an employee in good standing.
- Assurance of release time for course work and field education.
- Field placement assignments which differ from those associated with the student's current or past employment.

The plan for field education must be educationally focused, not centered solely on agency services, and must meet the criteria that have been established for all of the School's field placements.

8. Who can supervise the student's employer based field placement?

The student's Field Instructor must have an MSW with 2 years of post-degree experience and agree to provide the student with a minimum of one hour of supervision per week. The Field Instructor cannot be the student's job supervisor. If the agency does not have a qualified MSW on staff, the agency may look to other MSWs with involvement in the agency, such as contract staff, volunteers, or board members, since a degree of familiarity with the agency is important. If an off-site Field Instructor is selected by the agency then an appropriate on-site Task Supervisor different from the student's job supervisor must be assigned.