

## 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 Generalist and Specialization 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 are the roles and responsibilities of the field team?

It is in the field education experience that theory, policy and conceptual learning from the classroom comes to life. The transfer of learning is only possible through a collaboration of efforts from the student, the school (primarily through the field faculty) and the agency via the field instructor. The relationships that develop among these partners create the environment that supports and guides achievement of the student's learning outcomes.

#### *Field Instructor*

The major responsibilities of the MSW field instructor include helping the student select appropriate learning activities that support the development of social work competencies, evaluating the student's competence, and providing weekly supervision. The field instructor is particularly instrumental in guiding discussions about social work values and ethics, providing a context for the student to understand social work practice, and helping the student integrate theories and skills learned in the classroom with the field setting. The field instructor should communicate regularly with the task supervisor to ensure that a consistent learning experience is provided for the student and to better understand the student's strengths and challenges. The field instructor, task supervisor, and student should participate in a joint meeting with the field faculty three times each academic year.

#### *Off-site field instructors*

When there is no MSW field instructor at the agency, an MSW affiliated with the agency may be assigned as the field instructor. The MSW may be a faculty member at the University, work in another program at the agency, or be a board member or volunteer. This individual should have a clear knowledge base of agency functioning and be familiar with the services provided and competencies necessary to be successful within this environment. Social work placements with external supervision can have advantages for students. They can provide placement experiences in non-traditional or emergent fields, allow for expanded multi-disciplinary work, used in rural settings in which MSW's are less available, or may be associated with an employer-based placement. There are also potential challenges with this arrangement, such as the lack of a clearly defined social work

role, and limited opportunities for field instructors to observe student performance in the placement.

### *Task Supervisor*

Task supervisors guide and shape the student's field experiences on a day-to-day basis. They offer a variety of learning activities and help the student facilitate completion of daily tasks. The task supervisor should be available to model practice behaviors, observe the student, and provide feedback to the student, field instructor and field faculty about student performance and progress toward achieving competencies.

### *Field Faculty*

The primary responsibility of the field faculty is to support those experiences that enhance the professional development and skills of MSW students. The field faculty is the School of Social Work faculty member who serves as a liaison between the student and the agency. Field faculty foster collaboration between the field instructor, task supervisor and student, and visit the agency several times per academic year to meet with all parties. They are available to troubleshoot should any challenges occur in the placement.

### *Student*

Students are expected to actively engage in translating and applying classroom learning to their experiences in field. Students should schedule weekly supervision with the field instructor and task supervisor and create agendas to guide those sessions. Students are responsible for communicating with the field instructor, task supervisor and field faculty about successes and challenges they experience in field.

## **3. 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.

## **4. 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.

### **5. 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 and Task Supervisor Training**. Each field instructor is assigned a **Field Education Faculty Member** 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.

### **6. What are the benefits that UNC offers to field instructors?**

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) UNC electronic library privileges; (b) an annual field instructors' appreciation conference; 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. More information about training opportunities may be found [here](#).

### **7. How is the placement assignment determined?**

Generalist (1<sup>st</sup> year) practicum placements are made by the Field Education Program faculty in consultation with students. Specialization (2<sup>nd</sup> year) practicum placements are also made by the Field Education Program faculty in consultation with the students. Unlike the Generalist students, however, Specialization 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 generalist practicum students, we seek opportunities that will broaden their professional experience and address core knowledge in developing basic social work skills. In the generalist practicum students must engage in both direct and macro practice activities. Specialization 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. A blank Memorandum of Agreement may be found at the end of this document.

### **8. What are the goals of the first (generalist) practicum?**

The generalist 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.

### **9. What are the goals of the second (specialization) practicum?**

In their second year, students select a placement in their **area of concentration**. Students may choose either Direct Practice or Community, Management and Policy Practice. 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.

### **10. 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 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.

### **11. 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.

### **12. 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 discuss. 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. You will find a checklist for the pre-placement interview [here](#).

### **13. How many hours per week are students in field?**

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.

Typically 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 generalist students are in their field agencies **16 hours per week on Wednesdays and Thursdays** and full time specialization students complete **24 hours** of placement on **Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays** (except for University and agency holidays) unless a special schedule is arranged. Thus generalist students complete 60 days and specialization students complete 90 days in the field during the academic year.

Students in the Winston-Salem and Triangle MSW 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 generalist or specialization 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.

### **14. Are students allowed to transport clients in their own personal vehicle?**

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.

### **15. Do students carry liability 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).

### **16. 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*.

### **17. 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 field faculty after consultation with the field instructor and discussions with the student. The student receives a separate grade for each semester of practicum.

### **18. 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 [placement concerns policy](#) for more information.

### **19. What supervision model do we use?**

Our model of supervision for Field Education comes from the work of Alfred Kadushin. We teach a model that explains the importance of three types of supervision, administrative, supportive and educational. Administrative Supervision involves the day to day management of the supervisee's work which may involve discussing and explaining agency policies and procedures, assigning cases or other work tasks, reviewing and explaining paperwork and monitoring the students casework or other tasks. Supportive supervision involves discussing student's various emotional reactions to the work and helping the student to develop self awareness. In Educational Supervision, the typical supervisory tasks include: discussing theoretical approaches and strategies for interventions with client systems, reviewing ethical issues, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and examining how issues in the social environment and particularly issues of diversity affect the client system. In our Field Instructor training course we discuss each of these aspects of supervision and provide role played examples.

### **20. What field education policies and procedures are students expected to follow?**

All students are expected to follow all policies and procedures of the Field Education Program as outlined in the Field Education Program Manual and the NASW Code of Ethics. Therefore, prior to beginning a field placement, students are expected to sign a statement indicating their understanding and agreement to adhere to these policies and ethical standards.

**21. What happens if a student requests a clinical/practicum accommodation in their field placement through Accessibility and Resource Services (ARS)?**

The School of Social Work aims to create an educational environment that supports the learning needs of all students. The University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. The Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) office at UNC has been established to coordinate all accommodations. If a student might need accommodations at any point during the semester, they should contact ARS prior to the beginning of the semester or as early in the semester as possible. Information about ARS is available their website at <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu), or (919) 962-8300. The accommodations process starts with ARS and helps instruct Faculty at the School of Social Work on how best to proceed. Approved accommodations will likely require coordination between the field education faculty, the agency and the student. If a student inquires about receiving, accommodations in their field placement ask the student for their permission to contact the assigned field faculty member.