

## EMPLOYER-BASED PLACEMENTS

Practicum 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 placements may be developed for students to fulfill their practicum 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 the practicum is to provide students with educational opportunities that lead to competent social work practice. Therefore, an employer-based 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 their practicum in their current place of employment?**

Employer based placements are one option that may be developed for students to fulfill their practicum education requirements while retaining a connection to their employing agency. Employer based placements can provide students with the opportunity to continue employment with their agency while completing either their Generalist or Specialization Practicum. Employer-based placements must afford the opportunity for students to achieve new social work knowledge and skills and provide learning opportunities that meet the nine required core competencies in the learning agreement. 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. The practicum learning activities may be the same as the student’s employment duties if there is a plan for the student to demonstrate a growing level of social work competence as outlined by the nine core competencies and related practice behaviors and the student is in a learner role. Opportunities to develop competence can include new intervention methods, populations, skills, and knowledge.

#### **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. Arrangement and approval of the placement plan requires involvement of the following individuals: Student/ employee, current work supervisor, agency director (or designee), proposed Practicum Instructor, Task Supervisor (if applicable), and practicum faculty from the School of Social Work. A practicum faculty will meet with those listed above to determine if the proposed plan meets practicum requirements and to answer any questions. The Practicum Education Director grants final approval of employer-based placements on a case-by-case basis.

#### **4. What are the benefits of an employer-based 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 from their coursework 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 benefits from their ongoing professional development.

#### **5. What are the challenges of an employer-based 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 workload to accommodate student learning activities. As a result, the student role may be under-prioritized 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, which may then 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 the employer (i.e., the work supervisor, an agency executive, Practicum Instructor, and Task Supervisor, if applicable). It is then reviewed by the assigned practicum faculty member who schedules a meeting with the student and agency representatives. Once the practicum faculty signs the employer-based placement request, the Practicum Education Director will review the request and must approve it before the placement can begin.

#### **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:

- Student's current job duties and current work supervisor contact information
- Proposed placement learning activities and proposed practicum instructor and task supervisor (if applicable)
- Designated placement activities which meet the nine core competencies and related practice behaviors
- Proposed work and practicum schedule

The plan for practicum 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 placements.

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

The student's Practicum 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. Practicum education supervision may be provided by the student's work supervisor if the practicum education supervision is distinct from employment supervision. 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.