

**University of Washington**  
**School of Social Work**  
**Questions and Answers about Field Practicum**  
**for New/Potential Field Practicum Instructors**

This fact sheet is designed to provide a brief overview of the requirements and processes regarding field placements for students from the University of Washington School of Social Work. More detailed information can be found in the Practicum Manual for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Welfare and in the Practicum Manual for the Master of Social Work Program. To obtain a manual, contact the Assistant Coordinator for Practicum, Cheryl Yates, at (206) 543-8618 ([dancin1@u.washington.edu](mailto:dancin1@u.washington.edu)). For other questions, contact J'May Rivara or Stan de Mello, Co-Directors of Practicum at [jbr@u.washington.edu](mailto:jbr@u.washington.edu) or [demellos@u.washington.edu](mailto:demellos@u.washington.edu) or call (206) 616-5792 or 616-5983. Our website is: [www.depts.washington.edu/sswwweb/practicum](http://www.depts.washington.edu/sswwweb/practicum).

**Q. What is field practicum?**

Field practicum is the internship portion of the bachelor's and master's level social work programs. Students work alongside experienced social work professionals in human service agencies and organizations agreeing to supervise students as part of their commitment to the training and development of future social workers. Practicum instructors and students develop an educational contract specifying a work plan with learning objectives and specific activities to supplement classroom theory with practical experience and skill-building. Progress in practicum learning is graded as credit/no credit.

**Q. What are the standards and procedures for certification of agencies as practicum sites?**

When an agency has been identified as a possible practicum site, a faculty Practicum Coordinator confers with the agency to discuss the possibility of an affiliation. The faculty Practicum Coordinator will ask the agency to identify a contact person, who must submit a Practicum Placement Data form and biographical information on Practicum Instructors. Once placements are confirmed, the agency will be asked to enter into an Affiliation Agreement with the School. This allows students to be covered by malpractice insurance through the University of Washington.

**Q. What are the expectations of the agency providing practicum sites for students?**

Regarding student education, the agency should provide students with:

- A designated practicum instructor(s);
- Opportunities for direct, supervised learning with clients, social service agencies, and other community organizations and resources;
- Opportunities for directed learning towards understanding professional values and ethics and their applications in social work practice;
- Orientation and training in working with agency policies and procedures;
- Safety training;
- Appropriate role definition and role modeling in professional social work behavior;
- Opportunities to learn and to integrate knowledge about assessment, intervention, and the use of personal and environmental resources;
- Opportunities for students to evaluate their own practice.

The agency must also demonstrate acceptance of its responsibility to social work education, by:

- Maintaining policies and procedures which are compatible with the values and ethics of social work;
- Assuring adequate staffing to maintain its programs without reliance on students;
- Demonstrating willingness to plan with School faculty regarding student learning experiences;
- Allowing the Practicum Instructor ample time to carry out teaching responsibilities, including time to attend meetings and workshops and a minimum of 1 ½ hours per week in regularly scheduled supervisory conferences with their students who are in placement 16-24 hours a week (adjusted accordingly for those in practicum a greater or lesser time);
- Selecting and accepting students without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, political orientation, age, marital status, disability, or veteran status;
- Prohibiting discrimination against students, staff and clients based on the above criteria.

**Q. Who can be a practicum instructor?**

Practicum instructors are chosen by mutual agreement of the School and agency/organization and must meet the following qualifications:

- a) Have an MSW degree from an accredited school of social work;
- b) Have at least two years of post-MSW degree social work experience;
- c) Be employed by and on site in the practicum agency or organization;
- d) Supply the School with a resume and/or Practicum Instructor Biographical Form.

Additional requirements: Practicum Instructors must attend School of Social Work Practicum Orientation and Training Workshops, which focus on educational contracting, problem-solving, student evaluations, and other selected topics. They must also commit time to and demonstrate interest in supervising social work students.

**Q. What are the responsibilities of the Agency Contact Person and practicum instructor?**

**1) Information:** The Agency Contact Person must be willing and able to:

- submit to the School a Practicum Placement Data form, obtained from the Director or Assistant Coordinator of Practicum, which describes the organization's mission, population, and services, as well as the number and level (MSW and/or BASW) of students requested, potential student activities, and transportation requirements;
- interview with the practicum instructor(s) select students interested in placement at their agency/organization to answer questions, clarify potential student roles and responsibilities, and to determine suitability for placement based on mutuality of needs, interests, and goals.

**2) Education:** The Practicum Instructor must be willing and able to:

- teach and evaluate students: conceptualize, communicate, and provide role-modeling of professional knowledge and skill; develop an individualized educational contract with specific learning objectives;
- identify individual learning styles and needs of students and be sensitive to the emotional aspects of socialization to the profession;
- delegate and assign professional responsibilities to the student on a limited and monitored basis;
- allow adequate time for student orientation, supervision (at least 1 ½ hours per week), case or project consultation, related reading, and sequencing of student activities to assure successful learning.

**3) Evaluation:** The Practicum Instructor must be willing and able to:

- evaluate the educational experiences for each student, based on the individualized educational contract ;
- become familiar with the goals and standards of professional education, meet regularly with the student to assess progress towards learning objectives;
- complete quarterly evaluations provided by the School. The evaluation tool is designed to facilitate assessment of professional development as well as progress towards completion of assigned tasks.

**Q. How are students assigned to practicum sites?**

Information regarding available placements, learning experiences, and Practicum Instructors is collected twice a year. The Practicum Placement Data form is completed by the agency to include placement descriptions (mission, populations, geography served, and services offered) and potential student activities with individuals, families, groups, communities, culturally diverse populations, etc. This information helps Practicum Coordinators determine whether an undergraduate BASW or MSW foundation student will be exposed to micro through macro practice experiences, and whether a second year or advanced MSW student will be able to learn skills and knowledge required by a particular area of concentration (e.g., Administration, Policy, Clinical/Contextual Practice, Dual Methods, or Advanced Generalist). Students also review these forms to help them decide which agencies they are interested in. Students and faculty Practicum Coordinators then meet to discuss work and volunteer experience, career goals, previous internships, learning needs, and practicum options. A student is tentatively matched to a site that best meets his or her learning objectives, but no placement is finalized without mutual agreement following an interview at the agency or organization.

**Q. How many hours are students expected to spend in practicum?**

**Bachelors program:** Seniors are required to spend 480 hours (16 hours per week) over Autumn, Winter, and Spring Quarters in practicum (Social Welfare 415). Concurrent with practicum, students meet at the school in a weekly two-hour practicum seminar (Social Welfare 405) to discuss and integrate field placement experiences with prior and current coursework in the social sciences, social work, and research. Practicum schedules are individually negotiated between the student and Practicum Instructor.

**Masters program hours:** Students fall into one of several program categories:

**a) Two year day students** are required to complete two field placements. As part of the Foundation

Curriculum, in their first year in Fall Quarter, students complete a one credit Introduction to Practicum Course, which includes placement and orientation to their assigned practicum. During Winter and Spring quarters students are in placement on Mondays and Tuesdays for a total of 320 hours and 8 credits (16 hours per week). In the Advanced curriculum, MSW students are in practicum on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays or 24 hours a week during Fall, Winter and Spring Quarters, for a total of 720 hours.

**b) Advanced Standing students** (those getting their master's degree in one year; for a limited number of students who have received an undergraduate degree in social welfare within the last five years): Students are in practicum Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays during Autumn, Winter, and Spring quarters for 720 required hours (24 hours per week). These students attend a summer bridge program which includes practicum preparation.

**c) Extended Degree Program students:** The practicum schedule may be individually arranged and must be approved by the student's Practicum Coordinator. In Winter and Spring Quarters of their first year Extended Degree program students complete their one credit Introduction to Practicum course. Foundation students complete a total of 320 hours in the agency; Advanced students complete 720 hours of practicum. Weekly hours are negotiable and may vary, as most students work full or part time and need to carefully plan and arrange practicum schedules.

**Q. What kind of support does the School of Social Work extend to Practicum Instructors?**

**1) Practicum Instructor Training:** New field instructors are required to attend two three-hour workshops, which cover an overview of the BASW or MSW curriculum; roles and responsibilities of Practicum Instructors, students, and the School; safety for students in placement settings; educational assessment; educational contracting; learning styles assessment; problem-solving with students; assessment of student progress; and student evaluation.

**2) Practicum Liaison:** Each agency is assigned a Practicum Coordinator from the School faculty as liaison. The Practicum Liaison will visit the agency at least once during the student's practicum to provide information regarding School expectations, and offer suggestions regarding the coordination of classroom and practicum activities. The Liaison may assist with the development of the educational contract and/or evaluation if needed, and answer questions regarding the School's educational programs and policies. The Practicum Liaison should be contacted if the student or Practicum Instructor have any difficulty with placement suitability or performance. The Liaison will also review the educational contract and quarterly evaluations and assign the quarterly grade for practicum.

**Q. What are the benefits for Practicum Instructors through the University of Washington?**

Practicum Instructors are entitled to a UW library card, obtained at Suzzallo Undergraduate Library. Appointment to the affiliate faculty (for those within UW Health Sciences) or clinical faculty (for those with an outside agency or nonacademic unit of the University) may be made as a form of recognition of those practitioners whose contributions to the educational mission of the School have been continuous and substantial. To qualify, Practicum Instructors must apply and demonstrate a successful career of teaching and community service, a minimum of five years of professional social work practice, responsibility for practicum instruction in at least three of the previous five years, with expected continuation of those responsibilities. Additional benefits for Clinical/Affiliate faculty include a University email account and Intramural Activities Building use privileges (fee).

**Q. What opportunities exist for Practicum Instructors, field agencies, and the School to further explore practicum implications?**

A Practicum Advisory Council was established in 1994 to provide consultation to the School of Social Work faculty and Practicum Coordinating Committee regarding practicum curriculum, policies and procedures, and coordination between classroom and field learning experiences. The Council promotes the following goals and objectives: identify and utilize methods of interaction between agencies, students, and the School; develop and implement standards of excellence in practicum instruction; recognize contributions of practicum faculty to the education of Social Work students; increase practicum faculty on School committees; increase opportunities for the continuing education of practicum faculty; increase classroom faculty participation in practicum education; and increase practicum faculty participation in classroom education. The Council is made up of practicum instructors, classroom faculty, student representatives, and the Director of Practicum.