Field Education  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
University of Pittsburgh  

QUESTIONS STUDENTS ASK ABOUT FIELD PLACEMENT

Q: Will I get the field placement that I want?

A: Significant effort goes into the planning process to identify student interests, career plans, and learning and supervision needs. Requests have to be considered with reference to the existing field resources of the school. Sometimes students get what they request and other times they do not; however, the major consideration that overrides all requests is whether the agency can provide the necessary educational experiences appropriate for the student’s program and regular, structured field instruction. Students should not request a field placement in a particular agency where they or family members have been or currently are in treatment.

Q: How many hours of field placement do I have to do?

A: MSW students do a total of 1080 hours of field placement over the course of the program. A typical full-time program breaks down as follows:

1st year, Foundation Placement: (360 hours total over two terms)
   Fall Term  
   3 credits, 16 hours per week, minimum of 144 field hours  
   Students also complete a weekly field seminar that meets one hour per week over the 15 weeks of the fall term.

   Spring Term  
   3 credits, 16 hours per week, minimum of 216 hours

2nd year and Advanced Standing students, Concentration Placement  
(720 hours over two terms)
   Fall Term  
   6 credits, minimum of 360 hours

   Spring Term  
   6 credits, minimum of 360 hours

** No student may end their field placement more than two weeks in advance with the written permission of the Director of Field Education.

BASW Students do a total of 600 hours over two terms in the senior year.
   Fall Term  
   6 credits, 3 days per week, minimum of 300 field hours  
   Students also complete a weekly field seminar that meets three hour per week over the 15 weeks of the fall term.
### Spring Term
6 credits, 3 days per week, minimum of 300 field hours
Students also complete a weekly field seminar that meets three hour per week over the 15 weeks of the spring term.

Part-time students may follow some variation of this plan, but under no circumstance may a student engage in fewer than 16 hours of field placement per week. Any variation from standard hours, including accelerating hours, must be approved by the student’s field advisor, field liaison, and the field instructor. Students who are working full time and registered for a full time academic program may **not** be able to meet the hourly requirements for field. Working students need to be able to make appropriate work schedule arrangements to perform at least 8 hours of field placement during daytime hours.

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**Q:** How can I get a paid field placement?

**A:** Paid field placements are not commonly available. Those few paid placements that are available are most often for second year students. Lack of a stipend is **NOT** an appropriate reason to decline a field placement. The necessary stipend forms can be obtained from Mrs. Colleen Scholl in the Dean’s Office.

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**Q:** What do I need to know about HIPAA before entering field placement?

**A:** The federal regulations related to HIPAA continue to unfold. Basic information and web links can be retrieved from the following site, [http://www.cms.gov/HIPAAGenInfo/](http://www.cms.gov/HIPAAGenInfo/). The Office of Field Education also has a handout on the school’s web site. Available at: [http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/downloads/HIPAAInfo.pdf](http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/downloads/HIPAAInfo.pdf)

Students should review this information prior to entering field placement. For first year students, this information will be reviewed in the field seminar.

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**Q:** What if I don’t like where I am sent?

**A:** The real issue is not “liking” but whether the field assignment can provide you with appropriate learning experiences. Sometimes you can prejudge an experience and fulfill your own worst fears. On the other hand, a valid reason not to consider a particular agency will be accepted. Valid reasons include distance or transportation getting to an agency and personal or previous issues that may be exacerbated by the nature of the services provided by an agency.

There are many students, now graduates, who will tell you that they had exceptional experiences in settings that they would have never chosen by themselves!

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**Q:** How will I know if it is a good field placement?
A: The real question here is: are you learning what you need to be learning? Structured learning experiences that flow from the identified learning objectives are essential. Field instruction that is regular, formal as well as informal, and aims to help you prepare for your assignments, integrates theory and research into your tasks, develops and provides feedback about skills, and begins to help you to shape critical and reflective thinking are equally important. You are also a significant part of the field placement. Bring an open attitude toward learning, responsible professional and ethical behavior, consideration for others, preparation for assignments and supervision, and active participation to the agency.

Q: What if a problem comes up after I begin field placement?

A: There are problem solving guidelines in the Student Handbook and the Field Education Manual. Simply put, talk to your field instructor. If you don’t quite know what word to use or how to shape up your problem focus, talk with your field liaison. Most problems in field are simple miscommunications that can be easily remedied by increasing and improving communication. Remember that a focus of your learning is to understand and apply problem-solving skills and that includes problems that you face as a student. Under NO circumstances are students permitted to terminate a field placement.

Q: What can I expect once the field placement starts?

A: Each field assignment is different. It does take several weeks to be fully involved in the work of the agency, but your field instructor should have an orientation plan for the first few weeks. In most settings that you will be assigned, it is unrealistic to expect that direct client/consumer work will be assigned in the initial weeks unless you have had previous significant and relevant work experience. Most likely, you will learn how the agency operates, who the people working in the agency are, what policies, procedures, and forms you will need to follow. Following or shadowing other staff, observing, sitting in on meetings, reading previous records and reports are all a part of an orientation process. If this continues to occur beyond mid term, you need to discuss the matter with your field instructor and field liaison from the school.

Field Education Website:

www.socialwork.pitt.edu/academic-programs/field-education/

Field Education On-Line Agency Directory

www.fieldedlink.pitt.edu

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