



IMPORTANT QUESTIONS 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 goals, and learning and supervision needs. Requests must 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 keep in mind that all agencies will focus upon the 9 competencies of Social Work and that parallel and transferable skills are available at all field placement sites. Please note that this is not a shopping experience and that field work is a class. Students should be aware that they are not buying a BASW or MSW Degree but rather paying for the opportunity to earn one.

Q: How many hours of field placement will 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: Please note that each field credit equals 60 hours at the site. Lunch hour may or may not be counted dependent upon agency policy.

1st year, Generalist Placement: (360 hours total over two terms)

Fall Term

3 credits, 16 hours per week, minimum of 145 hours for the term.
130 hours at the field agency
15 hours in the field seminar

Spring Term

3 credits, 16 hours per week, minimum of 215 hours for an overall total of 360 hours.

2nd year and Advanced Standing students, Specialized Practice Placement

(720 hours over two terms for full time students or 3-4 terms for part time)

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 and must reach the minimum total of 720 hours.*

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 hours 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 hours 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 12 hours of field placement per week or more than 24 hours per week without written approval. Any variation from standard hours, including accelerating hours, must be approved by the student's field coordinator, 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.

Q: Can I count hours when the agency is closed for a holiday but I was available to attend that day?

A: Only hours actually clocked at the agency and signed off upon by the field instructor on the time sheet can be counted. The School cannot honor hours in which the student was available but the agency was closed. We suggest students ask about holidays and dates the agency may be closed during the interview process.

Q: If I fall behind in hours how may I make them up?

A: Students behind in hours and attempting to finish hours in a following term may only work up until two weeks into the following term and only be behind in hours a maximum of 60 hours (1 credit) to avoid registering for field credits in the following term. Otherwise, if the hours are more than 60 hours and/or will be unable to be completed within the two weeks- the student will then be required to register for at least 1 credit of field work in the following term and defer graduation to this next term. For example, if graduation was to be in April it would be deferred to either June or August of that summer term. University policy further states that graduate students **must** be registered for at least 1 credit in the term of graduation. A student completing work from the previous term can request a waiver of the registration requirement through the Associate Dean of the School of Social Work. These requests are officially processed when a student submits a graduation application form to the University Registrar's Office.

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. Consult with your Field Advisor for more information. Please note that if you are unable to be matched to a field site after 3 interviews that your situation will be reviewed with the Director of your program.

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, <https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/index.html> Students should review this information prior to entering field placement. For first year students, this information will be reviewed in the field seminar and a completion of a training is required. For Advanced Standing Students, it will be reviewed in the Advanced Standing Orientation prior to the start of your placement.

Q: What do I need to know about being a Mandated Reporter before entering field placement?

A **mandated reporter** certificate of completion due no later than **the first day of field work** and a student cannot start field work until this certificate is completed and on file with the School of Social Work. For first year students, this information will be reviewed in the field seminar and a completion of a training is required. For Advanced Standing Students, it will be reviewed in the Advanced Standing Orientation prior to the start of your placement.

Q: What if I don't like where I am at for my field placement?

A: The real issue is not "liking" but whether the field assignment can provide you with appropriate learning experiences and ability to achieve competency. 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! Please be aware that no student should request to be placed at an agency/site where they themselves or a close family member has or is receiving services. This would include Schools or School systems.

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 competencies and practice behaviors 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. Along with awareness of cognitive and affective reactions. 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: How do I get my clearances and screenings that I made need?

A: **Please be aware that agencies now require Act 33, Act 34 or FBI fingerprinting clearances**, and may also require health screening etc., before you may begin field placement. More information on how to obtain these can be found at <http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/academics/field-education/resources> . Please be sure to ask during the interview what other screenings or tests the agency site may require.

Q: What if I may need accommodations at the field site?

For the Safety of all students and for students who require accommodations, the Recommended Procedures (outlined by the DRS office and legal counsel) on students seeking accommodations for field work through the University's Office of Disability Resources are as follows.

- a) Students who have a disability for which they are or may be requesting an accommodation related to their field placement are encouraged to contact both their field advisor (person who is matching them to a field site) who will inform the Director of Field Education and Disability Resources and Services (DRS) in 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890 as early as possible before the term. Students may start this notification when completing their request for field placement form.
- b) Accommodations related to field placement are determined based on an interactive process among the student, DRS, field advisor and the Director of Field Education and the field placement site to determine if the requested accommodations are reasonable and do not alter an essential feature of the program requirements. As such, accommodations previously established for didactic coursework may not apply.
- c) Once accommodations are determined, DRS will forward a copy of the Notification of Accommodations specific to field placement to the Director of Field Education who will communicate the accommodations directly with the appropriate field advisor and the student's field liaison (person who will monitor the progress of the student during the field experience to include at least one field visit per term). The field advisor will discuss the accommodations the are being requested directly with the field placement site.
- d) If an agency is unable to provide a reasonable accommodation, the School will request a written statement from the agency indicating the reasons why they are unable to provide reasonable accommodations and the Office of DRS and the School of Social Work (the student's field advisor and the Director of Field Education) who will review the written statement and will re-engage interactive process and/or identify an alternative field placement site.
- e) Accommodations that are deemed reasonable in one field placement may not apply in other required field settings, therefore students are responsible for engaging with DRS, their field advisor and the Director of Field Education for each field placement.
- f) Notification of Accommodations will be maintained in a secure filing cabinet within the Director of Field Education's Office and the respective field coordinator will be granted access as needed.
- g) Should the student's request for accommodations change during the duration of the field placement, DRS will re-engage with the student, the field advisor, the Director of Field Education, the student's field liaison and the field placement site in the interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.
- e) Should the field placement site be unable to meet the previously approved accommodations, the Director of Field Education will request a written statement from the agency indicating the reasons why they are unable to continue to provide the accommodation and the Office of DRS and the School of Social Work will review the written statement and will re-engage interactive process and/or identify an alternative field placement site.
- f) Field Sites and Instructors are informed of the DRS process as follows: A representative from DRS attends and orients all Field Instructors at the Field Instructor Orientations held at the beginning of the Fall, Spring and Summer terms.

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

- A: There are problem solving guidelines in the MSW Student Handbook. 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 without following the problem solving process.

Q: May I do my field placement where I work?

In order to consider your employment based request- we need a copy of your job duties and a copy of your proposed internship duties at your place of employment and a completed employment field placement request form.

The placement must meet the criteria set up by the Council on Social Work Education which indicates the following

- (i) The School of Social Work permits students to be assigned to employment-based field placements when the following criteria are met:

- (ii) 1) the agency must be qualified as an approved field site,
- (iii) 2) the employment assignments and experience must be different from the field learning assignments and experience,
- (iv) 3) the field instructor is not the employment supervisor and qualifies as a field instructor, and
- (v) 4) the student provides a schedule of hours that are acceptable to the school, employer, and field instructor and the hours that a student is a student intern cannot be the same hours that they are an employee.

Q: May I do my generalist and specialized practice internships at the same site?

Similar in nature to a student requesting to do a field placement where they are employed is the situation in which the student and agency request the student remain as an intern at the same agency for both the generalist and concentration field placements. While this is unusual, this option may be considered under the following conditions. As described here in the School of Social Work, a request for a student to remain at the same field site from generalist to concentration must entail supervision, hours, and field-based learning/skill development opportunities separate and on a concentration level from those associated with a student's generalist placement experience.

School Policy is outlined below:

(i) The School of Social Work permits students to be assigned to the same field site for both generalist and concentration field placements when the following criteria are met: 1) the agency must be qualified as an approved field site, 2) the concentration assignments and experience must be different and on an advanced level from the generalist field learning assignments and experience, 3) the student is not considered an employee and the internship supervisor qualifies as a field instructor, and 4) the student provides a schedule of hours and concentration learning plan draft that are acceptable to the school, employer, and field instructor.

(ii) The concentration field placement must be able to meet the requirements of the student's educational program and level. The role of learner is tied to learning opportunities that reflect the program's competencies and characteristic practice behaviors and learning dimensions.

(iii) In any and all requests of this nature in order for the School of Social Work to review and consider approval- the School requires the student and proposed field instructor to complete either the DP or COSA field learning plan (whichever is appropriate) showing how the 2nd year will be a higher degree of learning on a concentration level and that the learning will not be a repeat experience of the first year Generalist field placement. Although unusual, the School can approve these requests if it can be shown that even though the student is physically remaining at the same location, the advanced experience, supervision and learning tasks would be as if the student was being moved to a new site.

Students must not do less than 12 hours per week in a supervised field placement and 8 of those hours should be during the day so that students can participate in the life of the field organization.

Professional field education staff interviews each student requesting a same site field placement. When all the appropriate information is available, the field coordinator will contact both the proposed field instructor as well as the Director of Field Education before making a final recommendation.

(iv) Recommendations are reviewed with the Director of Field Education before a final decision is made.

(v) In all discussions with students, and proposed field instructors, the field coordinator will ask each to evaluate the potential for conflict of interest issues to arise before final approval.

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 Agency Directory:

www.fieldedlink.pitt.edu

Handbooks:

<http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/academics/policies-handbooks>

Revised 09/20