

FIELD EDUCATION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Winona State University
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM



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Question & Answer

1) What is Field Education?

Field Education is the “hands-on” component of your learning experience as an MSW social work student. Field Education integrates knowledge and skills from the curriculum to the field setting. Practicum and internship are used interchangeably when referring to one’s Field Education. There are different Field Education requirements for regular-standing and advanced-standing students. Regular-standing students complete both a foundation and clinical practicum, while advanced-standing students complete only the clinical practicum. Please reference pages 39–57 of the MSW Student Handbook for more information about MSW Field Education: [WSU MSW Student Handbook](#)

2) What is a foundation practicum? What settings or types of agencies are appropriate for a foundation practicum?

The foundation practicum is the first practicum experience for regular standing students and provides you opportunities to develop generalist social work skills. Foundation practicum is a minimum of 400 hours over two semesters. The MSW Learning Contract Supplement Core Competencies can be used to identify possible generalist social work learning activities for a foundation placement. When considering field settings, use the core competencies supplement to determine if they will provide appropriate generalist social work learning opportunities. Some examples of generalist social work include case management, advocacy, outreach and education, skills work, school social work, macro level work, homeless shelters, foster care/adoption agency, non-profits in mental health, county/social service, for-profits in mental health, group homes, and victim advocate centers.

3) What is clinical practicum?

The clinical practicum is for both regular and advanced standing students and provides you opportunities to develop clinical social work skills. Clinical practicum is a minimum of 600 hours over two semesters. The MSW Learning Contract Supplement Specialized Competencies can be used to identify possible clinical social work learning activities for a clinical placement. When considering field settings, use the specialized competencies supplement to determine if they will provide appropriate clinical social work learning opportunities.

4) Where can I complete my clinical practicum?

Some examples of clinical practicum settings include therapy (settings may include private practice, school, non-profits, hospitals, etc.), hospital, school, crisis center, partial hospitalization program, intensive outpatient program, hospice, and county. The Winona State University MSW program recognizes that practice settings and social work professionals vary in how they define clinical social work. Students can share the learning contract specialized competencies supplement with a potential site to ensure they feel the setting can meet clinical practicum requirements and provide clinical social work learning opportunities.

5) Does the practicum experience or number of hours vary between full-time and part-time MSW students?

In short, no. Part-time students will have the same practicum experience as full-time students. However, part-time students will not begin their practicum until their second year of enrollment in the MSW program.

6) Who is my Field Liaison and what is their role?

The Field Liaison is a WSU faculty member responsible for supporting and monitoring placement and is the instructor of your practicum/seminar course. Faculty field liaisons link the MSW program and the practicum setting through regular communication with the student and field instructor. The Field Liaison will monitor your progress in your practicum by approving timesheets, reviewing learning contracts, and grading seminar assignments. Your Field Liaison will meet with you and your field instructor for a virtual site visit at least once during each semester for the purposes of evaluating your learning, monitoring competency growth, address any concerns, and ensuring the field setting is providing adequate learning opportunities.

7) What is seminar course?

The seminar course, taught by your Field liaison, is a class you will take concurrently with your practicum hours. According to the student handbook, the seminar course will, "require MSW students to utilize critical thinking skills in the areas of self-awareness, relationships with others in social work practice settings, social work theories and their relationship to working effectively with diverse populations, and practice skills needed for competent social work practice" (MSW Student Handbook, page 40). The seminar course will also create opportunities for consultation on practicum experiences.

8) How is the field practicum/seminar grade determined?

The Field Liaison will assign you a final grade for your seminar course based on your final field evaluation (completed by your field instructor) and your ongoing completion of seminar course assignments.

9) Who is my Field Instructor and what is their role?

Your Field Instructor will be a licensed professional MSW who will guide and supervise you during your field practicum. Field Instructors must be licensed social workers at the graduate level or above in the state that they are employed and with two years of practice experience. Field Instructors will assist you with identifying learning activities for your learning contract and will ensure opportunities are provided at the placement setting for you to demonstrate competence. Additionally, your Field Instructor will provide you with supervision a minimum of four hours a month and will provide feedback to assess your progress towards competence. Depending on the size, scope of your placement site and your Field Instructor's responsibilities, your Field Instructor may assign additional Task Supervisors to oversee your daily activities.

10) What if an agency doesn't have a qualified MSW to supervise me? Does this mean they can't host a student?

When potential field settings can offer students innovative practice opportunities but do not have a qualified MSW social worker, an off-site MSW social worker can fulfill the Field Instructor role. Please see pages 51 and 52 of the MSW student handbook for more information on field settings with an MSW Field Instructor.

11) What will I be learning during field practicum? How will I know if I learned what I am supposed to?

In the early stages of your field practicum, you will develop a learning contract with your Field Instructor that will guide the activities and opportunities you hope to experience during your field practicum. This learning contract serves as a social work competency development plan and is structured around the 9 MSW core or specialized competencies. You will review your learning contract with your Field Instructor and use it to track your accomplishments and development in each competency area.

12) What is a learning contract?

The learning contract is an ongoing, working document that you initially develop as a vision and guide for how you want to develop and demonstrate competency in your field practicum. As your field practicum continues, you will use it as a tool at your site and in supervision. It is expected that students will take the lead on communicating what they want to learn at their practicum in this document. Field Instructors can provide guidance, suggestions, and request for specific learning activities to be captured in the learning contract. At the midpoint and end of your field practicum, you and your field instructor will provide feedback and evaluate your performance in practicum using the learning contract.

13) How and when should I find a site to complete my field practicum?

It is your responsibility to find a field setting and field instructor; however, the MSW Field Office will support and guide you throughout the process to secure a placement. You will begin looking for a Field practicum site at the direction of the MSW Field Office, usually 3—9 months prior to the semester your practicum begins. The MSW Field Office will provide you with field orientation modules to complete that will guide you through the field placement search process and how to complete the field application. The best way to get started is to begin researching agencies in your area who have MSWs and contacting ones you are interested in to learn if they have internship openings and what their process is for applying. Additionally, Tevera (WSU's Field Management program) has a list of agencies that have hosted WSU MSW students in the past. This can provide you with another starting point. There are a broad range of agencies and organizations that can serve as a potential field practicum setting.

14) What is the process for securing a field placement?

- 1) *Student completes the MSW Field Orientation modules and quiz located in D2L under self-registration courses.*
- 2) *Student completes MSW Field Practicum Application in Tevera, including uploading a resume.*
- 3) *Student submits an order for a national criminal background study through CastleBranch (if this is their first practicum)*
- 4) *After the Student's practicum application has been approved by the WSU MSW Field Office, the student contacts agencies to explore potential placements and schedule interviews.*
- 5) *After conducting interviews, when a student finds a compatible placement that has accepted them, the student submits a placement recommendation form or an employment-based recommendation form and the results of their CastleBranch background study via Tevera to notify the MSW Field Coordinator of their intent*

- 6) *The student enters the name of the agency and their prospective Field Instructor's email address into Tevera to notify the site representative and Field Instructor to complete credentials and profile applications.*
- 7) *Once the WSU Field Office verifies there is an active WSU affiliation agreement or generates a new agreement (if it is a new site), the MSW Field Coordinator will approve and finalize the field placement in Tevera and the student will be notified.*

15) Can I apply to more than one field setting or agency?

Yes! You may apply to as many field settings or agencies as you see fit.

16) What if I interview with a site for an internship and I am not selected?

Begin looking for a field setting elsewhere. In many cases, agencies have a very limited number of internship opportunities and their decision to not select you should not be taken personally. If you desire, you may reach out and ask why you were not selected. Receiving this feedback can be a good opportunity for self-reflection.

17) How does a new site get approved to host an MSW student intern?

If a student intends to complete their field placement with a site that has not worked with WSU previously, the WSU MSW Field Office will reach out to a representative from the new site to answer questions, ensure the field placement is a good fit for students, and to complete a WSU affiliation agreement.

18) Can I begin my Field Education before my classes begin?

You are allowed to begin your field practicum hours no more than two weeks prior to the official beginning of fall semester. WSU purchases group professional liability insurance on every student intern, and this begins two weeks prior to fall semester. Contact the MSW field staff to identify the earliest date that you are allowed to begin your hours.

19) Can I complete my field practicum hours during nights and/or weekends?

If your field setting offers evening, night and/or weekend hours, you can complete your practicum hours during these times. Some field settings may not offer evening, night, or weekend hours. This is a good point to clarify with your potential field setting during the application and interview process.

20) How do I keep track of hours completed during my field practicum?

You will track your completed practicum hours in Tevera, the WSU field management program. Tevera is a web-based software used to organize and manage the student field experience. It is the student's responsibility to log internship hours in Tevera, and ensure the Field Instructor, and Field Liaison approve hours. During your concurrent Field Seminar course, your Field Liaison will provide you with more instructions on how to submit timesheets using Tevera. Your practicum site may have additional expectations on how to track and report completed practicum hours. Ask your field instructor if they have requirements for time tracking in addition to the timesheets in Tevera.

21) How many hours do I need to complete my field practicum? How many hours is this per week on average?

Foundation Practicum: You will need to complete a minimum of 400 hours for foundation (regular standing students only), spread out over two semesters, which averages to 12-15 hours per week.

Clinical Practicum: You will need to complete a minimum of 600 hours for clinical placement (both regular and advanced standing students), spread out over two semesters, which averages 18-20 hours per week.

22) Do I need a specific amount of direct vs indirect hours or number of client contact hours for my practicum?

No, there is no specific breakdown of practicum hour requirement for "indirect" contact or "direct" contact hours. You and your placement setting can identify the breakdown of hours that would support your development and demonstration of the competencies.

23) What activities can be counted as practicum hours?

Students can "count" direct and indirect client hours, orientation, trainings, readings, community meetings, staff meetings, etc. as practicum hours. If the activity/task/meeting relates to practicum responsibilities and learning activities, then it should be documented on your timesheet and learning contract. The activity doesn't need to be completed "on site" at the placement setting. Practicum hours can be via zoom or remotely completed off site, such as at home or in the community. In addition, supervision time with the MSW field instructor is also to be included in total practicum hours. These activities and supervision time are opportunities to demonstrate social work competencies. If you would include the task/meetings/activities as a learning activity on your learning contract, then you would want to document it as practicum hours on timesheets.

24) What is supervision? What counts as supervision?

According to the NASW, supervision in the social work profession "is defined as the relationship between supervisor and supervisee in which the responsibility and accountability for the development of competence, demeanor, and ethical practice take place. The supervisor is responsible for providing direction to the supervisee, who applies social work theory, standardized knowledge, skills, competency, and applicable ethical content in the practice setting. The supervisor and the supervisee both share responsibility for carrying out their role in this collaborative process." Supervision with the MSW field instructor can consist of individual or group supervision (or a combination of both) and completed in-person or virtually face-to-face. Students must receive a minimum of four hours of supervision each month with their Field Instructor. During supervision your field instructor will use the NASW code of ethics and social work frameworks to apply ethical decision making to practice. They will also assist you in developing the learning contract, identify generalist or clinical learning opportunities, provide feedback on activities for further growth, and assess your progress in your practicum learning.

25) What happens if I do not meet the required number of hours?

While it is ultimately your responsibility to track your hours completed and ensure you meet the required number of hours (400 for foundation practicum and 600 for clinical), your Field Instructor and faculty liaison will also monitor your completion of field practicum hours. If you believe that you may not meet the minimum number of

hours required by the end of the semester, reach out to your Field Instructor and Field Liaison as soon as possible to discuss options and develop a plan.

26) Can I complete my field practicum at my place of employment?

The MSW Student Handbook outlines the full list of requirements for the Field Office to be able to approve an employment-based placement. In brief, your employer will need to be able to provide you with learning activities that are new and different to you as a student. If you are interested in trying to secure a Field Placement with your employer, you should review pages 52-53 of the MSW Student Handbook for the full list of employer-based placement requirements and work with the Field Office to determine if your employer will be able to provide an appropriate placement.

27) Can I be compensated for my field practicum work?

Yes, Winona State University allows compensation for internship hours. Compensation varies across Field Education placements. Some Field Education sites may offer compensation while others do not. This is a good question to ask your potential Field Education sites during the application and interview process.

28) I currently work at an agency that provides social services or I have experience providing these services in the past. Do I have to complete field practicum?

Yes. While you may bring past or present experiences to your program and field education, the experiences gained by, and objectives of employment are different from those of Field Education. During Field Education, you will deliberately apply classroom learning to your activities and engage in reflection about your experiences during professional, structured supervision. For this reason, the Field Education experience will complement your concurrent classroom learning and is distinct from the purposes and objectives of traditional employment.

29) Can I complete all of my field practicum hours in one semester or full-time block?

No. Field Education must be integrated into concurrent coursework, which allows students to apply learning from the classroom into the field setting on an ongoing basis. Your field practicum hours must be scheduled consistently through the fall and spring semesters. You are allowed to begin your practicum hours 2 weeks prior to the start of the fall semester and are allowed to end their field practicum hours no earlier than 2 weeks prior to the end of the spring semester.

30) What will my weekly schedule at my practicum site be?

Consult with your Field Instructor to develop a weekly schedule conducive to the agency setting, and that meets the minimum number of practicum hours each semester. This ensures you and your Field Instructor agree regarding your time commitment to your internship.

31) Do I complete my practicum hours during winter break between fall and spring semester?

Yes. Further, winter break can be a good time to get caught up on any practicum hours you may have missed.

32) Am I able to take time off while completing my field practicum

Yes. All time off requests must be pre-approved by your field instructor. Work closely with your Field instructor and Field Liaison to coordinate any time off requests with as much notice as possible. You are required to make up any missed hours or days and work closely with your Field Instructor to meet the needs of the setting. Should unforeseen circumstances arise for you that interfere with completing the required hours promptly inform your field instructor and field liaison to identify a plan for completion of missed hours.

33) Can I continue to work full or part-time while completing my field practicum?

This is a personal decision, and a variety of personal factors and circumstances may be considered when choosing either to continue, end, or reduce employment. Many students make the choice to continue employment while completing their Field practicum and coursework.

34) During my field practicum, what should I do if I encounter a client that I am familiar with from my personal life, school, or my employer?

Seek guidance from your Field Instructor and field liaison as soon as possible. Your agency may have established procedures to limit your access to information about people that you know personally. The NASW Code of Ethics provides standards and guidelines in such situations: <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English> Discuss with your field instructor and faculty liaison ethical decision making to address dual relationships and/or conflicts of interest.

35) What if I don't like my field practicum or want to switch placements?

Once a student commits to a site and accepts a placement offer WSU does not advise or generally support a student backing out of the commitment. The student handbook states, "Students are to remain at the same field placement setting over the 2 sequential semesters in order to maximize learning opportunities. The faculty field liaison will explore with the field instructor and student any concerns that arise regarding the setting to explore options and promote continuity of the placement." If an extreme situation arises, the student will request a meeting with the Field Director, Field Liaison, and program advisor to communicate concerns. The student and faculty will address concerns at the Field site before any decision is made to terminate an internship.

36) I don't see my question on this list. Where can I look for more information?

You may look for additional information in the MSW Student Handbook or contacting your Faculty Guide and the MSW Field Office.