MSW Program Field Placements - Frequently Asked Questions

FULL PROGRAM (53 CREDIT), FULL-TIME STUDY

Spring 2016

Welcome to the School of Social Work! All the members of the Field Team look forward to working with you to assure a successful and rewarding field placement experience. Please read this entire document carefully, and pay close attention to the various dates and deadlines. If you have any questions, please call Rosetta Chears at 612.624.4241 or email her at rchears@umn.edu. If she doesn’t know the answer (which isn’t likely!), Rosetta will know how to help you find the right person.

We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,
MJ Gilbert, MSW, LICSW, Director of Field Instruction

Important introduction

When do I need to start thinking about and planning for my field placements?
NOW!! Your field education will be the heart of your MSW training, and unless you choose to do a block placement next summer (see below), you will need to start planning for your first field placement now. The MSW program orientation, field orientation and field fair will take place at Coffman Union on the Minneapolis campus of the U of M on Tuesday April 5, and the interview period will begin the following day (see section 2 below). Field placements are secured through a competitive interview process. Beginning field in spring semester is not an option. Please read this entire document CAREFULLY and bring any questions to MJ Gilbert (mgilbert@umn.edu).
Section 1: General Questions

1. **What is “field” and how does it fit into my MSW course of study?**

   Field is the heart of the MSW education— it comprises the most time and the largest block of credits in your graduate curriculum. As a student in the M.S.W. program at the School of Social Work, you apply your classroom learning in social work agencies under the supervision of an MSW field instructor. Field is, in essence, a “laboratory” for you to use the skills and concepts you are learning in the classroom, and to bring those experiences back to the classroom. It is also, honestly, a “test” of your ability to not just study, but also PRACTICE social work—an opportunity to show that you are able to integrate classroom acquired knowledge and skills in real world social work practice.

   Full Program students complete two field placements, a foundation placement during the first year SW 8010 - Field Practicum I, for which they earn six credits (3 per semester), which is accompanied by an integrative seminar, and a concentration field placement during the second year- SW 8020- Field Practicum II, for which they earn six credits (3 per semester). **SW 8010 requires a MINIMUM of 420 hours of service at the placement, and 8020 requires a MINIMUM of 600 hours of service at the placement.** While there are a minimum number of hours required for a field placement, successful completion is measured by achieving competence as measured by a learning contract, not merely through the accumulation of hours. The foundation field placement (SW 8010), which is accompanied by an integrated seminar, provides a generalist orientation to the field of social work, while the concentration placement (SW 8020) supports the student’s chosen area of concentration.

2. **When do I do my Field Placements?**

   Students may complete the field requirement in a concurrent placement over the academic year (September through May) at the same time they are completing their foundation year or concentration year requirements. The other option is a summer block placement following completion of the year’s required coursework. There is more information about this below.

3. **What kinds of field placements are available and where are they located?**

   The School of Social Work offers a wide array of field placement possibilities at a range of agencies throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area and extending into Greater Minnesota, and neighboring states. The vast majority of placements are in the greater Twin Cities area. The field team will work to assist students hoping for placements close to home, but cannot guarantee students a placement in a given neighborhood or geographical area.

4. **Can I do a field placement in another country, or beyond the upper Midwest area?**

   Not for your foundation (SW 8010) field placement. There are options for you to do your concentration field placement in another part of the country or overseas. Please refer to the Policy for International Field Placements in the SSW field manual.
5. How will I know what to look for in a field placement?
Your field placement gives you the opportunity to practice, integrate and refine new skills and knowledge that you are learning in your MSW coursework. Field placements also allow you to try out practice in different areas of social work: working with new populations of people and/or trying out social work tasks and activities you’ve not done before. We encourage all students to stretch themselves and get out of their practice comfort zones! We discourage you from pursuing a field placement that replicates work you have already mastered. In a field placement, you have the luxury of being in a student role, with the expectation for rich and relevant learning, not just production or efficiency.

6. What about the “life balance” considerations related to doing a field placement? Field placements demand a lot of your time, energy, and commitment. Most field placements require that you intern during daytime work hours when the supervising field instructor is available, and when the heart of the agency’s work is done. The MSW class schedule allows space for being in field, for the most part on Mondays Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Some field placements offer late afternoon, evening or weekend hours. However, with VERY rare exceptions, you should not plan on being able to complete the bulk of your hours during these timeframes, in large part due to the need for you to have substantive learning opportunities with robust support and supervision.

If you are currently working and plan to continue working during your MSW study, you need to figure out – NOW – how you will be able to schedule your life so that you can give the needed time and attention to your field placement(s). You may want to talk with your employer about very part-time work, flexible work hours, or a leave of absence.

Those of you with family obligations, you should also start talking with your family members now to form a realistic plan that takes into consideration your school/internship time commitments and the inevitable strains that these additional obligations may create.

Field placements are generally viewed by students as the most meaningful part of their social work graduate education. Don’t cheat yourself when you are planning the completion of your MSW! Plan well enough that you can be fully present as a student in your field placement and use the learning opportunities available in it to significantly advance your professional growth.

7. I am currently employed in a social service position. Can’t I just use that for my field placement?
In a word, no. YOU CANNOT USE YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYMENT TO COUNT FOR YOUR FIELD PLACEMENT. The reason is related both to the requirements of the SSWs accrediting body, and the purpose of field education, which is to allow you to try new
things, to gain new knowledge, to take risks and grow, free from the performance requirements of an employee. There is a process and application for completing a field placement at your place of employment, but that must be in a different area of the agency, with different space and supervisor (see section 3 below).

8. I have years of social service experience. Can't I just get credit for that?
In a word, no. The SSW's accrediting body prevents giving credit for previous life experiences. MSW field practice provides you an opportunity go beyond the knowledge and practice base you bring into the program.

9. What are my options for structuring my field placement?
Students who study full-time generally take 14 credits each semester, which includes 3 credits for field. If you are one of these students, you have two options for completing field:

**Option A)** You can do a concurrent field placement that runs the length of the academic year. Students begin field in the fall semester and spend 14 hours each week in the field setting. In the majority of settings, concurrent placement is the preferred way to integrate field and classroom learning.

- If you are entering as a Full Program (53 credit), full-time student and plan to begin a concurrent field placement in fall 2015, you should attend the Field Fair Orientation and Field Fair on April 5th, 2016, at the U of M Coffman Union. Read Section 2 “Field Fair and the Placement Process” carefully for more details.

**Option B)** You can do a block placement over 12 weeks in the summer following your first full year of classes and completion of your social work practice methods courses (see below). Students who do a block placement spend about 35 hours each week in the field setting.

- If you are an entering Full Program, full-time student and plan on doing a summer block placement, during the summer of 2017, you do not need to attend the Field Fair on April 5th, 2016. There will be an information session for Summer Block placements in early 2017.

**BUT - important to remember!** Students who register for a summer block placement face an overall tuition increase as a result of registering in an additional registration period, i.e. summer semester.

**IMPORTANT NOTE TO ALL FULL PROGRAM, FULL-TIME STUDENTS:** You must take the first field placement concurrent with or in the summer following completion of the foundation practice methods sequence:
- SW5051-Human Behavior in the Social Environment
- SW5101-Historical Origins & Contemporary Policies and Programs in Social
Welfare
- SW8141-Social Work Research Methods
- SW 8151- Practice Methods: Individuals & Systems
- SW8152- Practice Methods: Families & Groups
- SW8153-Models of Community Intervention
- SW8154-Organizations & Policy Advocacy

The Foundation courses listed above must be completed prior to the start of your second field placement, which is your concentration field placement.

Section 2: Field Fair and the Process For Concurrent Placements

1. What are the steps in finding a field placement?

Before you do anything else, set up your University of Minnesota email account. This is the primary way you will receive information from the School of Social Work, including information from the Field Team. In addition, you will soon receive an email from Rosetta Chears, Field Program Coordinator, with information on getting access to the Intern Placement Tracking (IPT) database. You will be asked to set up a username and password to the IPT database, which is the primary source of agency information and field paperwork. Make sure you retain your username and password as you will be using this site throughout your entire time at the School of Social Work.

The School of Social Work begins the Fall 2016 – Spring 2017 field placement interviewing process with the Field Orientation and Field Fair on Tuesday, April 5th, 2016. The Field Orientation provides students with information about how field works, on what to look for in an internship, how to choose the best internship for their needs and how to effectively interview for internships. The purpose of the Field Fair is to provide a setting for students and agency representatives to meet, exchange information, and to arrange for formal interviews starting the next day.

The first day that actual interviews can take place is Tuesday, April 6th, 2016. There are no exceptions to this policy, except in the possible case of placements outside the Twin Cities metro area. If this is the case for you, consult the Director of Field Instruction.

IMPORTANT POINT: YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO ARRANGE INTERVIEWS WITH AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES UNTIL YOU HAVE CONFIRMED ENROLLMENT WITH THE U OF M SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK. Agency representatives need to know which MSW program they are dealing with when they take the time to interview students.

The three graduate social work programs in the Twin Cities (University of Minnesota, Augsburg College, and University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine) follow the same timelines for interviewing and selecting agencies. The three programs match students cooperatively in a joint meeting after the interviewing process is completed. Because it has proven beneficial to all three programs and to agencies to have a shared timeline and process, any attempts by students to circumvent the process will result in forfeiting the opportunity to interview at the desired agency.
Even if your interview goes well, agency field instructors and students do not make the final decisions at the time of the interview. Final placement decisions and approvals of placements are made by the Field Department. After completing interviews with multiple agencies, students rank order their choices on the IPT website (see section 2, part 1 above).

**Choices must be submitted by May 9, 2016.** Agencies will submit their student preferences to the Field Department by the same date. We then meet with representatives of the other MSW programs and complete the matching process. Students and agencies are formally contacted, via email, with the confirmed placement information in late May 2016.

Don’t panic if you don’t immediately get matched. This happens, especially when students pursue agency placements that are highly competitive or interview only with one or two agencies. For this reason, **you are strongly urged to interview with 3-5 agencies.** Fewer than 3, and you run the risk of not getting matched. More than 5, and we burn out our agency representatives!

After the formal spring matching process is completed, there are still many agencies that are interested in having fall interns and there is, in fact, a “second round” process that takes place through mid-summer. The School’s field coordinators will help you select additional agencies for interviewing and will provide direction and support until you have secured an appropriate field placement. Occasionally, a student will need coaching in effective interviewing skills. Field coordinators can also help you with this.

2. **When is the Field Orientation and Field Fair and how do I know if I should attend?** The annual Field Fair is intended for students who plan to begin a concurrent field placement in Fall 2015. It will be held at the Coffman Union Great Hall on the East Bank Campus. It is preceded in the morning by a MSW program and field orientation for new students.

   **Date:** Tuesday, April 5, 2015  
   **Time:** Orientation: 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.  
   Coffman Union, the Whole music club  
   Field Fair: 3-5 p.m. Coffman Union Great Hall

For maps and directions, click on this link: [http://campusmaps.umn.edu/tc/](http://campusmaps.umn.edu/tc/)

The Orientation provides students with information on what to look for in an internship, how to choose the best internship for their needs, and how to effectively interview for internships. The Field Fair offers the opportunity for students to meet with representatives from the local agencies offering internships, obtain contact information, and begin to arrange one-to-one interviews. **We strongly urge students to attend Field Fair if they will be beginning a field placement in fall 2016.**

**If you are planning to do a Block Placement in Summer 2017, you do not need to**
attend Field Fair. You will receive information about a Summer Block information meeting in early 2017.

3. How can I prepare for Field Fair?

   Again, make sure you know how to get access to the IPT database since this is where you will find information about the agencies offering field placements. Do some homework ahead of time. A listing of field placements for the fall-spring 2016-17 academic year will be available by March 25th on the School's field placement website: http://www.cehd.umn.edu/SSW/Current/msw/Field/default.asp. Once you access the IPT database, you will also be able to access this link from this database.

   Read the document “Understanding Agency Descriptions and Availability Tables” and then look at the Fall-Spring 2016-17 Agency Availability List. Once you have reviewed the list of available placements (making sure that you are attending to which placements are eligible for FOUNDATION students), go to the specific agency/placement descriptions at the Field Intern Placement Tracking (IPT) site to find out more information about placements that interest you. Begin making a preliminary list of agency placements you would like to explore at Field Fair and during the subsequent interviewing period that lasts from April 6th – May 6th, 2016. Then update your resume and bring copies to share with agency representatives at the Field Fair on April 5th, 2016.

4. When can I begin interviewing with agency representatives?

   Important: before you begin scheduling interviews, you must confirm your enrollment with the U of M School of Social Work. Agency representatives need to know which MSW program they are dealing with when they start making appointments with students.

   The first day that actual interviews can take place is Wednesday, April 6th, 2016. There are no exceptions to this policy, except in the possible case of placements outside the Twin Cities metro area. If this is the case for you, consult the Director of Field Instruction.

   The three graduate social work programs in the Twin Cities (U of Minnesota, Augsburg College, and University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine) follow the same timelines for interviewing and selecting agencies. The three programs match students cooperatively in a joint meeting after the interviewing process is completed. Because it has proven beneficial to all three programs to have a shared timeline and process, any attempts by students to circumvent the process will result in forfeiting the opportunity to interview at the desired agency.

5. What if I plan on starting a field placement in Fall 2016 and am absolutely unable to attend the Field Fair on April 5th, 2016?

   The Field Department must know whether or not you plan to start a field placement this fall. If you absolutely cannot attend the Field Fair, contact MJ Gilbert, Director of Field Instruction, immediately (612.624.4259 or mgilbert@umn.edu) so that you can get the information you need to begin your field placement search. You should also immediately complete a “Field Practicum Application” located at
http://www.cehd.umn.edu/SSW/Current/msw/Field/default.asp
and then follow the link to “Field Placement Forms.” Complete the form and send it to MJ, via email attachment or regular mail. The application information will be used by field staff to help you in your placement search.

If you are currently living far away from Minnesota and will not be able to interview in person for a field placement, consult the Agency Descriptions in the IPT website. Many agencies designate willingness to interview via phone or Skype. If you are unable to begin an interview process until the summer, you may still secure a fall field placement. There are field staff members working at the School of Social Work throughout the summer.

Here is what you need to do:

- Contact MJ Gilbert (phone and email above) and let her know that you plan to do a Fall 2016 field placement.
- Complete a “Field Practicum Application” (see above) and send it to him, via an email attachment or regular mail. The information in your application will assist the field staff in helping you in your placement search once you have moved to Minnesota. They may also be able to refer you to agencies that are willing to interview you over the phone.
- Contact the Field Department as soon as you get into the Twin Cities so you can discuss your placement search and begin interviewing.

6. OK, I've interviewed with some agencies. What is the next step?

Even if your interview goes well, agency field instructors and students do not make the final decisions at the time of the interview. Final placement decisions and approvals of placements are made by the Field Department. After completing interviews with multiple agencies, your will rank order your choices on your Student Detail Page (your “home page” on the Intern Placement Tracking (IPT) web page. Look for the Agency Preferences heading just under the section containing your identifying information.

Your rank-ordered agency preferences must be entered on IPT by May 9th, 2016. Agencies submit their student preferences to the Field Department at the same time. We then meet with the other MSW programs and complete our matching process. Students and agencies are formally contacted, via email, with the confirmed placement information in late May.

7. What happens if I don't get matched?

First, take a deep breath! Don’t panic if you don’t immediately get matched. This happens, especially when students pursue agency placements that are highly competitive or interview only with one or two agencies. For this reason, you are strongly urged to interview with 3-5 agencies. Fewer than 3, and you run the risk of not getting matched. More than 5, and we burn out our agency representatives!

After the formal spring matching process is completed, there are still many agencies that are interested in having fall interns and there is, in fact, a “second round” process that takes place through mid summer. The School’s field coordinators will help you select additional agencies for interviewing and will provide direction and support until you have secured an appropriate field placement. Occasionally, a student will need coaching in effective interviewing skills.
Field coordinators can also help you with this.

Section 3: Other frequently asked questions about specific situations

1. How can I apply to do my field placement at the agency I work for (I have read section I, question 6 above, and I understand it)?

All proposed internships at places of employment must be carefully examined before approval is given.

If you are interested in doing a field placement at your place of employment, you should first study the School’s policy related to these internships. If, after reviewing the policy, you believe that the field placement you are proposing will meet the requirements, complete an “Internship at Place of Employment Application.” The policy and application may be found by going to: http://www.cehd.umn.edu/SSW/Current/msw/Field/default.asp and following the link to “Field Instruction Forms,” where you will find the “Application for Internship at Place of Employment.”

Please note that there is an early deadline for turning in applications for internships at place of employment. Because there is no guarantee that your proposed internship arrangements will be approved, the Field Department requires that you turn in your proposal early in the internship search process so that you will have time to explore other alternatives if your proposal is denied. This year, applications are due into the Field Department by no later than April 15th, 2016.

2. I have a specific agency in mind for my internship, but I am not sure if they have ever had MSW field students before. What do I need to do?

First of all, it is important to know what some basic requirements for approved field placements:

- There must be a person willing to serve as your field instructor. This person must have an MSW degree and a minimum of two years post-MSW experience (LICSW or LISW preferred).
- The potential field instructor must be able to provide at least one hour of direct supervision each week.
- The potential field instructor must participate in New Field Instructor Training offered by the School of Social Work. The training is available on campus or via an online course.
- The agency must be willing to commit to have you as a student for 16 hours per week (concurrent) or 40 hours per week (block).
- The agency must be able to provide you with a desk and ways (phone, computer) for you to engage your work.

If, after doing some preliminary research yourself, you believe that the agency you’re interested in would be able to meet these requirements, you should complete an
“Application for Developing a Field Placement.” The application may be found on the “Field Instruction Forms” link at: http://www.cehd.umn.edu/SSW/Current/msw/Field/default.asp
Submit the completed application to the Field Department. A member of the field team will then formally contact the agency and ask the proposed field instructor or agency contact to complete an online “Agency Description Form.” Once the Agency Description Form has been returned, a field coordinator will review the information and schedule a site visit. Not until the site visit has been made, and the agency and field instructor approved, can you formally interview.

Please note that there is an early deadline for turning in applications for establishing a new field placement. Because there is no guarantee that the proposed internship will be approved, the Field Department requires that you turn in your application early in the internship search process so that you will have time to explore other alternatives if your proposal is turned down. This year, applications are due into the Field Department by April 15, 2016.

Section 4: Time Lines Find your time frame, and make a note of the important dates!

1. What are the important dates in the field placement process, and do I really need to pay attention to them?

Yes, by all means! The Field Team is responsible for placing over 170 students for the fall, and we will definitely give preference to students who follow all procedures and meet all deadlines. So here are the important dates you need to know:

- March 25, 2016: Agency Information available on SSW website
- April 5, 2016: Field Fair
- April 6-May 6, 2016: Interview Period with Agencies
- April 15, 2016: Applications for Developing a New Field Placement due
- April 15, 2016: Applications for Internships at Place of Employment due
- May 9, 2016: Choice of Placement due, via the IPT website
- Late May 2016: Students and Agencies receive notification of placements
- June 1, 2016: Second round of placements begin
- August 29th, 2016: New Student Orientation (will include session on Field)
- September 6, 2016: 2016-2017 Field Placements begin!

Please let us know if you have any questions about the Field Placement process. We’re here to help!

Field Team Members:
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