



Field Education and Practicum

In social work education, internships are called field practicum. Field practicum experience is required by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) and is considered the “signature pedagogy” in social work higher education. The intensive field practicum experience allows students to obtain licensure immediately after graduating with a social work degree. With this emphasis, students spend a significant amount of time in field practicum experiences. Students are actively engaged in social work practice with clients in an agency setting for approximately 15-18 hours per week in a two-semester sequence (fall/spring only).

- Bachelor of Science in Social Work students complete 450 hours of field practicum
- First Year/Foundation Master of Science in Social Work students complete 400 hours of field practicum
- Second Year/Advanced Standing M.S. in Social Work students complete 500 hours of field practicum

F.A.Q.

General Information

1. Is there a difference between an internship and a practicum?

An internship is a common term used in all disciplines within higher education. However, a practicum typically denotes a more intensive experience usually seen in the helping professions, especially professional programs that allow students to obtain a licensure in their particular field of study. Therefore, in social work education, we use the term practicum to define the hands-on experience our BSSW and MSSW students receive while in the program. Practicums require students to gain direct experience working with clients and most field practicum students are viewed as part-time professional staff once trained appropriately. There should be very limited time spent in a practicum answering phones, filing staff paperwork, or conducting paraprofessional responsibilities. Practicums are required in all Schools of Social Work based on the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation criteria. Due to the intensive and structured nature of a social work practicum, field students are prepared to obtain their license immediately upon graduating. For more information about licensure standards, visit: https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/socialwork/sw_apply.shtm

2. What is the difference between a placement and a practicum?

The term practicum and placement are sometimes used interchangeably in many Schools of Social Work. The ‘placement’ is typically the actual agency in which a student is placed. The ‘practicum’ is typically the education experience the student is engaged in while enrolled in field courses.

3. What are the roles and responsibilities that students hold in a field practicum?

Once a student is placed at an agency, it is their field supervisor’s job to delegate roles and responsibilities. Most students, depending on the agency, will eventually be provided a small caseload and directly work with clients. More detailed roles and responsibilities within a particular agency are provided during the field education placement process.

4. What type of clients do field placement agencies serve?

The SSW has agency affiliations with over 60 agencies in Abilene and throughout Texas. These agencies serve a wide arrangement of populations and communities with great needs. Such populations or communities served include but are not limited to:

- individuals impacted by foster care and adoptions
- clients experiencing mental health and/or substance abuse
- newly resettled refugees
- individuals with disabilities
- victims of crime and abuse
- children and families
- veterans and/or active military
- those seeking medical care
- hospice patients
- clients experiencing grief and loss



- the elderly
- students struggling at all academic levels
- individuals seeking help in emergency/crisis intervention

The ACU SSW Field Education Program makes an effort to ensure that field practicum students are working in some aspect with their desired population.

5. Is there a class associated with the field practicum experience?

Both the BSSW and MSSW field students will be enrolled in the Field Practicum course that requires: 1) completing a certain number of field hours at a designated placement, and 2) attending and participating in a field seminar class.

- BSSW students enrolled in SOCW 381/481 meet in the field seminar class once a week for an hour.
- First year (Foundation) MSSW students enrolled in SOCW 681/682 meet in the field seminar class once a week for one hour.
- Advanced Standing MSSW or Second Year MSSW students enrolled in SOCW 781/782 meet in the field seminar class once every other week for an hour

These courses include assignments and discussions focusing on experiences in a social service agency. Students will apply knowledge and theory, and develop practice skills for a beginning or advanced level social work practitioner.

6. How many hours per week is spent in a field placement?

In order to fulfill the required 200 or 250 hours by the end of each semester, field practicum students should make arrangements to work between 15-18 hours a week at their field placement agency.

7. Can I do my placement somewhere besides in Abilene?

The majority of agencies utilized as field placements are located in Abilene or the surrounding areas of West Central Texas to ensure that field requirements remain focused on students in residence at ACU.

For students enrolled in the MSSW program, there is a possibility of an out of town placement that is contingent on many factors including but not limited to: 1) the student's degree plan and class schedule fitting well with a long-distance placement, 2) the student's skills and abilities in navigating a remote-learning opportunity are assessed and approved by the MSSW Program Director, 3) successful negotiation of a legal/business agreement between the ACU SSW and the potential placement agency, and 4) evaluation of the agency to ensure the placement remains educationally-focused and meets ACU School of Social Work Field Education Program expectations. To explore this option, contact the Director of Field Education.

Placement Process

1. When can I start looking for a practicum/placement?

The field placement process begins after a student has been accepted into the program, and in the case of incoming MSSW students, the student has confirmed his/her intent to enroll for the fall semester. Once the ACU SSW Field Program receives a finalized list of incoming students, students are contacted via email to begin the mandatory placement process. During the field placement process, students are provided with updated agency lists and must complete an online field placement application stating their top areas of interest and most preferred agencies. For more information about the timeline for this process, contact the Director of Field Education as it varies year to year.

2. Can I find my own placement?

This option is highly discouraged because the placement must meet certain Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation guidelines since a social work practicum is very different than other disciplines. Additionally, the ACU SSW Field Program must complete a legal/business agreement with a potential agency and the process can take many months and much negotiation. During the field placement process, students are provided a list of over 60 agencies already approved by the ACU SSW Field Education Program. In most cases, a student's interests are met by the current list of agencies. Once a student has started the ACU SSW Field Education Program placement process, they will receive updated lists of potential placement agencies.

3. During the field placement process, can I contact the agencies in which I am most interested?

No. Out of respect for the agency staff, it is important to abide by the field placement process provided by the Director of Field Education. Students are encouraged to conduct internet research to learn more about approved agencies during the placement process, but students should not contact agencies directly until instructed by the



Director of Field Education. In many cases, agencies may not accept a student who chooses to work outside of the placement process.

4. Is it possible to have a job while doing a field placement?

Field students typically complete 15-18 hours a week at their field placement while also attending classes. Therefore, a full-time job is not recommended. A student that is able to budget time and energy well might be able to work part-time if necessary. However, most part-time jobs need to occur in the evenings or weekends when possible.

5. Can I use my current job as my field placement?

If a student is currently working at a human or social service agency, she/he may request to be considered for this option. However, there may need to be significant changes to current job responsibilities in order to meet program requirements. Therefore, the agency would also need to be willing to accommodate any changes required for educational benefits. Submitting the request does not guarantee approval as the request must meet CSWE accreditation guidelines. The process to request this option is outlined in the Field Handbook. Once a student confirms enrollment in the field education program and begins the field placement process, this option may be explored further by contacting the Director of Field Education.

Note: A student that gains employment at a qualifying agency within three months prior (May) to beginning a field placement (August) may be able to use the new employment as a field placement if it meets the appropriate conditions as outlined in the Field Handbook.

Financial Information

1. Is there opportunity for a paid field placement?

It is rare for a BSSW student to receive a financial assistance from a field placement primarily because most professional paid positions require at least a bachelor's degree.

However, in the MSSW program, several placements can provide a stipend (direct payment to student) or a scholarship (direct payment to tuition bill) based on agency preferences. These placements are highly competitive and change from year-to-year. You may learn more about these opportunities once you confirm enrollment in the field education program and begin the field education placement process.

2. What if my field placement offers me a paid staff position while I am enrolled as a field practicum student?

Many ACU BSSW and MSSW graduates are offered temporary or permanent positions during their practicum experience. If this occurs, the Director of Field Education should be notified and the situation will be discussed with the agency and the student to ensure all educational requirements are still met. On several occasions, students may also be offered a paid staff position immediately upon graduation and/or completion of field practicum. Approximately 15% of ACU SSW graduates obtain employment from their field practicum.