Required Reading – 1st Field Placement

As you plan for your first field placement, you are probably considering a variety of learning opportunities with different populations. In your planning, consider the topics and field criteria summarized below. This information answers some frequently asked questions by students preparing for the 1st year (Generalist) field practicum. More details will be provided at the upcoming 1st Field Placement Orientation this Fall. Students must attend the 1st Field Orientation meeting prior to starting field.

Field Assignments
The primary educational objectives for students beginning their 1st field placements are:

- To expose students to a broad range of social work practice skills within a generalist framework.
- To help students integrate learning in practice settings different from past work experiences.

To meet these objectives, your placement is likely to offer alternatives to your previous work or volunteer experiences. Feedback from past graduates indicates that exposure to differential learning opportunities in field has been very applicable to their professional development. The Application for 1st Field Placement that you are asked to fill out is used to determine an appropriate field placement for you. The Field Office is responsible for assigning field placements for all students beginning their 1st field practicum. Students will have the option of selecting qualified field placements for their second (advanced concentration) field assignments.

Field assignments will be provided to you prior to the 1st Field Placement Orientation. Students will start receiving notification of field assignments soon after the Field Office receives the Application for 1st Field Placement. Notifications are sent throughout the summer; there is no need to contact the Field Office regarding the status of assignments before August 14th. Once you have received your placement assignment, you are responsible for completing a pre-placement interview. A useful guide to plan for this interview will be included with your field assignment mailing, but is also available on the Field Education website (“Guide to Placement Interview”). At the interview, you will discuss with the field instructor the available educational opportunities and services provided. Once you and the field instructor decide on a match, you both must complete and sign the MSW Field Verification Form included with your Field Education registration materials. The MSW Field Verification form must be submitted to the Field Office in order to receive a permission number to register for Field Instruction I (RSSW 650). You must register for Field Instruction before the start of the Fall semester. Delaying the submission of the MSW Field Verification form will consequently delay your ability to register for Field I. This may result in you being charged a late registration fee.

After you begin your field placement, you and your field instructor will develop a written learning plan for your placement (called a “Learning Agreement”). The Learning Agreement is usually due about two weeks into your placement and should summarize key learning objectives that align with the skills outlined in the evaluations (see “Evaluations” section below).
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Field Education within the MSW degree curriculum
The 1st field placement is a two (2) semester course (RSSW 650 and 651) conducted at one agency. This is part of the foundation sequence of courses in generalist social work practice. The 1st field placement includes both clinical and macro practice in social work, and it is taken concurrently with the Micro Practice in Social Work I and II courses (RSSW 620 and 621).

Semesters Required
Students remain at a single site for an entire academic year. In order to receive credit for Field Instruction I and II, students must successfully complete both semesters of the field sequence without interruption. Students must also be registered for RSSW 650 and 651.

Attendance Requirements
Students must be in field for two full 8-hour days per week, and this is non-negotiable. Field days are typically Mondays and Tuesdays. This continuity in scheduling is important for student learning, agency operations and consistency of client care. The field schedule also coincides with your class schedule each semester. The Calendar for 1st Field Placement provides specific dates for field, the number of days required and the start/end dates for field in the Fall and Spring. The Field Office provides an attendance sheet that must be filled out and signed by both you and your field instructor at the end of each semester. Please note that the vast majority of field sites DO NOT offer quality and consistent educational opportunities during evening and weekends. Because appropriate social work supervision is required during field days, requests for evening and weekend hours, when social work supervision is generally not available, are usually not approved. This factor may have particular significance for part-time degree students, so planning for Field Education requirements is necessary when considering the MSW degree program.

Registering for Field I and II (RSSW 650 and 651)
After receiving your completed MSW Field Verification form, the Field Office will issue you a Permission Number to add Field Instruction I for the Fall semester. In order to start Field I in the Fall, you must register for RSSW 650 prior to the beginning of the semester. A permission number is not needed to register for Field Instruction II (RSSW 651), as long as it is taken in the foundation sequence of coursework (Spring semester).

Grades for Field
Because 1st year field is a two-semester assignment, students receive a grade of “I” (Incomplete) for Field I (RSSW 650) at the end of the Fall semester. Upon successful completion of BOTH semesters (RSSW 650 and 651), students will receive a final grade of “S” Satisfactory or “U” Unsatisfactory. Students must perform satisfactorily in field in order to remain in the MSW program.

Work Study
1st year students may qualify for a Work Study option (see detailed information about the requirements for this option on the Field Education website).
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Field Liaisons
Students are assigned to a field liaison each year. Field liaisons provide a variety of supportive services designed to create cohesive working relationships between students and their field instructors. Students meet with their liaisons a minimum of once per semester and can contact them anytime regarding issues in field.

Field Seminar
Students are required to attend a field seminar that is taught by their assigned field liaisons. The seminar course meets several times per semester. Attendance, participation and completion of assignments are factored into the final grade for Field Instruction I and II.

Agency Background Checks
Background checks and finger printing may be required to qualify for an assigned field placement. Students are responsible for meeting those requirements if required before starting field. The cost of such procedures can be underwritten by the Field Fee. Students for whom background checks could be an obstacle to placement in field should seek guidance from the Director of Field early in the process.

Medical Clearance
Some agencies may require that students provide medical information and obtain health-related clearance for work with their clients. It is the student’s responsibility to achieve medical clearance by the agency in a timely manner. Failure to provide medical clearance information may delay the start of Field and, consequently, extend the time for completing Field at the end of the academic year.

Evaluations
There are three evaluation periods within an academic year. Scoring is based on demonstrated competence of core social work skills. Students are also evaluated on the completion of an assigned macro project. Detailed information will be provided about the evaluation process at the Field Orientation meeting. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that completed evaluations are handed in to the Field Office when due.

Timely Submission of Field Paperwork
It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that field paperwork is submitted when due. Failure to meet deadlines in field may result in delays in the field registration process and completion of field requirements; these events could impact degree clearance.

SSW Standards for Social Work Education
The School of Social Welfare has in place Standards for Social Work Education that provides guidance to students about field and the overall academic program. It is important that you carefully review and adhere to these standards (provided at Orientation and also available upon request).