Required Reading – 1st Field Placement (Generalist)

Welcome to the School of Social Welfare’s Field Education Program! As you plan for your 1st field (Generalist) placement, please consider the topics and field criteria summarized below. This information answers some frequently asked questions by students preparing for the 1st (Generalist) field practicum. More details will be provided at the upcoming Practice Skills Lab and Field Orientation.

SSW Standards for Social Work Education
The School of Social Welfare has in place Standards for Social Work Education that provide 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).

Field Education within the MSW degree curriculum
The 1st field (Generalist) placement is a two (2) semester course 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. To receive credit for Field Instruction I and II, students must successfully complete both semesters of field without interruption.

Registering for Field Instruction I and II
Course registration for Generalist field is as follows:
- Fall semester – Field Instruction I (RSSW 650)
- Spring semester – Field Instruction II (RSSW 651)
Registration for Field Instruction I (RSSW 650) requires a permission number that is issued by the Field Office when paperwork for the field assignment is submitted (instructions are included with the field assignment materials). A permission number is NOT needed to register for Field Instruction II (RSSW 651 for the Spring semester).

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 their past work experiences.
To meet these objectives, your field placement is intended to offer more diverse experiences beyond 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. It is very important to adhere to the due date of the Application for 1st Field Placement. Missing the due date of your field application could result in your field assignment being delayed for up to a year, which may subsequently prolong your academic program. In sum, do not delay getting your field application submitted by the due date!
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The Field Office is responsible for assigning field placements for all students beginning their 1st field practicum. Students will have the option of selecting their own qualified field placements for their 2nd (advanced concentration) field assignments. Field assignments will be provided to you prior to the beginning of the Practice Skills Lab. 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 field assignments before August 24th.

Field Assignments Cont.
Once you have received your field assignment, you are responsible for completing a pre-placement interview. Acceptance to an assigned field placement is determined by the field site. It is important that you prepare for your pre-placement interview in the same way that you would prepare for a professional employment 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”) http://www.albany.edu/ssw/student-field-education-social-welfare.php. At the interview, you will discuss with the field instructor the available educational opportunities and services provided at the agency.

If you are not accepted to the assigned field placement, the Field Office may assign you to another field placement. This determination will be based on the circumstances related to the denial of the first field assignment. Students who are denied two assigned field placements will be required to meet with a representative from the Field Office to determine the student’s readiness for starting field.

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 assignment materials. To receive a permission number to register for Field Instruction I for the Fall semester, the MSW Field Verification Form must be submitted to the Field Office when due. Delaying the submission of the MSW Field Verification Form will consequently delay your ability to register for Field Instruction I. This may also result in 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).

Work Study
First year students may qualify for a Work Study option (see detailed information about the requirements for this option on the Field Education website). Applications for Work Study are due to the Field Office by April 20.
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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 Generalist Field Instruction Calendar 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.

Requirements for Completion of Field Instruction I and II Coursework
Attendance to the Integrated Field Seminar sessions is required for all students entering the generalist field practicum. The Integrated Field Seminar is a separate peer group meeting that is facilitated by your assigned field liaison. It provides instruction, guidance and support to students in helping manage professional and practice issues encountered in field. Students will compare practice experiences, integrate classroom learning with practice, and increase their critical thinking skills. The Integrated Field Seminar is scheduled on designated dates on Wednesdays from 1:00-3:00.

Prior to beginning field, students are also required to attend Practice Skills Labs on Mondays and Tuesdays between Monday, August 27, 2018 and Tuesday, September 11, 2018. Field begins the following week (as indicated on the Generalist Field Instruction Calendar). The practice skills lab is an interactive learning environment that utilizes practice simulations and team based learning to prepare students to be active learners in the generalist field practicum. The practice skills lab is a supplement to the Field Instruction course, and is designed to prepare MSW students for beginning generalist social work practice in the field.

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 submitted to the Field Office when due.

Timely Submission of Field Paperwork
It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that all 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.

Grades for Field
Because 1st year field is a two-semester assignment, students receive a grade of “I” (Incomplete) for Field Instruction I (RSSW 650) at the end of the Fall semester. This does not impact your semester or overall GPA. 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.
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The assignment of a satisfactory grade for Field Instruction I and II is contingent upon the following:

- Attendance to and participation in all sessions of the Integrated Field Seminar
- Completion of the required number of field hours for the Generalist field practicum
- Satisfactory achievement of competency of generalist social work practice skills
- Attendance to and completion of the Practice Skills Lab.

Agency Background Checks
Some human service organizations have strict security standards for staff and students working with certain populations. Background checks and fingerprinting may be required to qualify for an assigned field placement. Students are responsible for meeting those requirements prior to starting field. The cost of such procedures is underwritten by the Field Fee, which is used to reimburse students who have to pay for criminal background checks and/or fingerprinting. **Students for whom background checks could be an obstacle to securing a field placement in field should seek guidance from the Director of Field Education 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 complete medical clearance requirements 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.

Field Liaisons
Students are assigned 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.