

Social Work Field Education: Overview

As with all practice-based careers, social work requires its students to apply theory to direct and community practice with clients. Assimilation of theory occurs in the classroom, but application of theory occurs in field education. Designated as the “signature pedagogy,” field education provides students expert supervision as they learn in social work settings. Learning from veteran social workers, students observe, practice, and experience the essential integration of theoretical knowledge with practice skills while working with diverse populations and communities. This experience also builds a sense of professional identity that can only be acquired in practice settings. In short, field education is the transformative process wherein students become social workers.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Office of Field Education

The Office of Field Education is a component of the UTA School of Social Work. The staff of the department design, implement, manage, monitor, and evaluate the field curriculum of the School of Social Work.

The responsibilities of the staff of the Office of Field Education include the following:

- To accept and review student applications (approval upon completion)
- To accept and review agency applications for affiliation (deny or approve)
- To facilitate the affiliation process.
- To maintain affiliated agency files and related databases.
- To accept and review Field Instructor applications (deny or approve)
- To match students to potential field placements.
- To review and maintain database
- To consult with faculty, students, field instructors, field liaisons, and Field Committee members regarding field policies and procedures as related to the curriculum.
- To conduct on-going evaluation of the field curriculum and processes.
- To ensure that field policies are upheld by students, Field Instructors, Agencies, Liaisons, and Field staff.

- To ensure compliance with Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) requirements for field education.

Foundation-year graduate students gain a generalist perspective in their field placements. Agency field instructors teach and demonstrate skills applicable across all levels of practice—micro, mezzo, and macro. This extensive knowledge base provides students with an overview of how individuals interact with their communities.

Advanced graduate students choose between five curriculum specializations: Health, Mental Health, Aging, Children and Families (all Direct Practice areas), and Community and Administrative Practice (CAP). Staff in the Office of Field Education match students to their second field placements according to the students' specialty area and unique interests.

The Field-Agency Partnership

The UT Arlington School of Social Work partners with more than 350 social service agencies in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area and beyond. These partnerships form the foundation of field education. Each placement relies on five key elements for success: the support of the SSW Office of Field Education; the commitment of the Agency to preparing students for practice; the time, guidance, and wisdom of the Field Instructor; the oversight and mediation skills of the Faculty Liaison; and the focused dedication of the Student. Working together throughout each semester, these factors ensure that the field experience is rich and rewarding. From this devoted collaboration comes the true goal of the field placement: the graduation of a social work professional who is well-prepared to utilize theory, ethics, and evidence-based practice to provide protection, necessary intervention, and social justice for those in need.

The Agency

The Office of Field Education affiliates with Texas agencies that are guided by a clear mission to serve diverse client populations. The Assistant Dean of Field Education thoroughly assesses each agency by reviewing the agency's application for affiliation, interviewing the agency's main contact and Field Instructor, and

visiting at least one of the agency's sites before determining the agency's appropriateness for affiliation.

Located in the center of the DFW metroplex, UTA is surrounded by hundreds of social service agencies from all areas of social work. Many of these agencies offer first-year students an array of micro and macro experiences while many others provide second-year students more focused specialization in the five areas mentioned earlier. Each semester, agency administrators decide whether they want to accept students and if so the number and type of students they can supervise. Sometimes agencies are undergoing changes that may prevent them from accepting students for a time; nonetheless, the Office of Field Education is always able to provide valuable placements in a variety of service areas. Moreover, the Office of Field Education continues to develop relationships with new agencies in DFW and throughout Texas to accommodate a growing local, distance, and online student population.

Many agencies open field placements for students year round: fall, spring, and summer terms.

Criteria for selection of an agency as a setting for student placement include the following:

1. The availability of necessary learning experiences;
2. The willingness of the agency executive and staff to support the educational goals of the SSW;
3. The clear understanding that placements are learning experiences for students and not intended to provide extra support to the staff for the sole purpose of conducting agency business;
4. The availability of appropriate, educational and instructive supervision, at least one hour of direct supervision per week from the approved Field Instructor;
5. The mission of the organization, or the identified program or department within an organization, must address human needs. This can include the areas of social policy formulation, administration, evaluation, research, direct service delivery, etc;

6. The agency/organization cannot engage in discriminatory practices in the hiring of personnel, the acceptance of students or clientele;
7. The agency/organization supports Field Instructors' participation in the Office of Field Education's Field Instructor Academy (either in person or online) and other additional or ongoing training as needed;
8. An agency must provide a Field Instructor with a Master's in Social Work from a CSWE- accredited university. For supervision of Master's level students, a minimum of two years of postgraduate social work experience is also required; to supervise BSW students, Field Instructors must have a BSW and/or an MSW and two-years of postgraduate professional experience.
9. The agency/organization must have necessary administrative capacity to sustain student activities (space, phones, privacy when needed, administrative support, etc.);
10. The agency/organization must take necessary precautions to protect students' safety. This may minimally include training in: policies and procedures for conducting home visits; interacting with potentially difficult clients; and handling emergencies, as well as appropriate screening of student assignments by Field Instructor(s);
11. The agency must communicate changes in MSW and BSW supervision to the Office of Field Education as soon as possible in order to make the necessary arrangements for student supervision;
12. The agency will provide a practice setting which will expand, enhance and/or introduce new elements into students' previous work and educational experiences;
13. When possible, agencies are encouraged to consider offering stipends to support students during the placement.

Meeting these requirements evinces the agency's commitment to using its physical and personnel resources to educate new professionals.

As mentioned earlier, field agencies have distinct goals for first-year and second-year students. **Foundation MSW field placements** are selected for affiliation based on their ability to meet the following goals:

1. The placement will promote students' identification with the core values and ethics of the profession;
2. The agency will develop students' understanding of its environment and the role of social work in this setting;
3. The agency will develop students' capacity to apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice;
4. The agency will make available a generalist perspective to social work practice with client systems of different sizes;
5. The agency will develop students' understanding of how social policies, programs, and institutions impact client systems;
6. The agency will cultivate students' capacity to engage in social work practice that is sensitive to culture, ethnicity, religion, race, class, sexual orientation, age, gender, intellectual capacity, and physical and mental abilities;
7. The agency supports the students' learning to accept and effectively utilize supervision;
8. The agency will provide modeling and teaching of appropriate and effective communication skills;
9. The agency will encourage students' development of self-awareness in the professional role.

The **MSW Advanced field placements** are selected for affiliation based on their ability to meet the following goals:

1. The agency will insist that students demonstrate the ability to function responsibly and effectively in an agency setting;
2. The agency will provide the opportunity for students to deliver appropriate services to client systems as defined by their area of specialization;
3. The agency will allow students to implement a range of interventions based on comprehensive client assessments;

4. The agency will develop students' ability to apply social work knowledge and theory to practice using critical thinking in practice approaches and decisions;
5. The agency will ensure that students demonstrate advanced knowledge and skill in their area of specialization;
6. The agency will sharpen the students' ability to engage in social work practice that is sensitive to issues of culture, ethnicity, religion, race, class, sexual orientation, age, gender, and physical and mental abilities;
7. The agency will instill in students appropriate and effective communication skills;
8. The agency will provide experiences that encourage students' ability to reflect upon and resolve ethical dilemmas in practice;
9. The agency will ensure that students demonstrate a disciplined use of self;
10. The agency will equip students with the ability to evaluate their level of effectiveness as a social work practitioner;
11. The agency will strengthen the students' commitment to and responsibility for ongoing professional development.

MSW Field Learning Contract

All MSW field students are required to agree to and sign a “learning contract” in collaboration with the field instructor. This document is based on the objectives of the MSW program. The learning contract identifies, defines, and operationalizes the learning objectives for the duration of the placement. Essentially, the learning contract serves as a “syllabus” for the field course and as an evaluation instrument for student performance. Student progress will be measured by their ability to meet or exceed the objectives.

The Field Instructor

Much rests upon the Field Instructor. The Field Instructor is the main contact for the student and therefore has great influence and responsibility. The agency-based Field Instructor's primary role is educating students. The Field Instructor creates and protects a positive educational climate for student learning. The Field Instructor engages the student in knowledge, value, and skill development service-giving assignments in the agency. The relationship between the student and the Field Instructor significantly impacts the quality of the field experience for students.

The Office of Field Education relies on agencies to identify potential field instructors, but final approval of the field instructor lies with the Office of Field Education. Criteria for the selection of Field Instructors include the following:

1. The primary Field Instructor of record must have a Master's degree from a CSWE-accredited School of Social Work along with two years of post-graduate experience in the field of social work. Professional wisdom and experience afford the broad perspective and understanding that are essential to educating students in the ethical and culturally competent practice;
2. The Field Instructor must be recommended by the host Agency as competent in the profession and capable of student instruction. The Agency must also agree to support the Field Instructor in the educational role;
3. The Field Instructor must agree with the learning goals of professional Social Work education and be committed to quality education for the student;
4. The Field Instructor is required to work closely with the School in the assignment of case material and is responsible for providing timely feedback to the School on the progress of the individual student through the Faculty Liaison;

5. The Field Instructor is expected to participate in the ongoing mutual exchange of ideas with the faculty by participating in the seminars and workshops that are held during the year;
6. The Field Instructor is expected to attend orientation sessions, complete online training modules available through the School's website and/or be available for individual orientation by the Faculty Liaison;
7. The Field Instructor for out of town or out-of-state placements must be on-site, in the designated agency, and licensed in accordance with that state's requirements.

In the role of educator, the responsibilities of the Field Instructor include:

1. Orienting the student to the agency setting. This includes all relevant personnel, policies and procedures, meetings, dress code, record keeping and agency documentation, confidentiality and HIPPA regulations, intake, referral, transfer and termination, special auspices, etc.;
2. Establishing a learning contract with each student;
3. Providing the necessary experiences to meet the educational goals;
4. Teaching the appropriate use of supervision including when and how it is utilized and to what purposes;
5. Serving as a professional role model;
6. Helping the student understand and appropriately use the network of human services available to the agency and the clients;

7. Communicating with the student and the Faculty Liaison the progress of the student throughout the semester;
8. Providing regularly scheduled and uninterrupted supervisory conferences for the purpose of enhancing the student's educational learning and practice skills;
9. Training and monitoring students' compliance with safety policies and procedures;
10. Notifying the Faculty Liaison as soon as possible should problems with the student arise in the field setting. If necessary, the Faculty Liaison and Field Instructor might then confer with the Assistant Dean for Field Education to make decisions regarding the student;
11. Participating with the School in a continuing effort to upgrade and enhance the Field Program;
12. Participating in the School whenever possible by sharing expertise in specific areas; and
13. Communicating to the Field Office any planned or unexpected changes that would impact current or future supervision of students.

The Field Liaison

Each semester, faculty and/or community agency representatives are assigned field liaison responsibilities by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. The field liaison is the UTA SSW "instructor of record." For foundation students, the Field Liaison plays two roles: 1. This person teaches the seminar class that accompanies the first field placement. 2. This person serves as an educational consultant to the field instructor and the student by contributing to the development of the student's learning contract, monitoring the student's educational progress and performance, and maintaining the relationship between the school and the agency. The field

liaison always monitors the “fit” between the Field Instructor’s teaching style and the students’ learning style. When necessary, the field liaison may assist in creating or adjusting assignments to maximize student learning. Advanced field students do not have a seminar class, so for these students, the liaison works solely in the second role. The principal responsibilities of the field liaison are as follows:

1. For first-year students, the liaison prepares and delivers relevant classroom information and assignments for the field seminar class. In addition, the liaison uses classroom time to allow students to discuss their cases and responsibilities in their field placements.

For all field students, liaisons bear the following responsibilities:

2. Initiating and maintaining contact with the field instructor and the student regarding the students’ professional development and educational objectives;
3. Completing the Liaison Agency Visit Contact Form after each phone, skype, or personal contact;
4. Assessing and monitoring the quality of supervision provided to the student;
5. Remaining available to the field instructor and the student to deal with problems that may occur during the course of the placement;
6. Identifying as early as possible issues related to the educational progress of the students;
7. Assisting both the students and the agency with the educational goals and resolving conflicts;

8. Facilitating the growth of the Field Instructor as educator;
9. Reviewing and signing the learning contract;
10. Reviewing the mid-term performance evaluation;
11. Reviewing and signing the final performance evaluation and submitting it to the Office of Field Education ;
12. Assigning the course grade (usually based on the recommendation of the field instructor);
13. Submitting all paperwork to the Office of Field Education at the end of the semester.

The Student

The primary responsibility of the student in field is to meet the educational objectives of field as an active adult learner both in the practice setting and in the field seminar. As such, students make a commitment to actively pursue the knowledge base and skills necessary to accomplish service delivery to clients who are often vulnerable and in need of assistance in problem solving. Students are not expected to possess this knowledge base and skills, but instead, to actively involve themselves in the learning process. This includes remaining open to and acting on feedback from the Field Instructor and agency staff, coming prepared to meetings and supervision, being willing to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and sharing this with the Faculty Liaison and Field Instructor.

Responsibilities of the student include:

1. Assisting in developing and carrying out the learning contract;

2. Submitting the learning contract signed by the field instructor to the field liaison;
3. Submitting a copy of the mid-term evaluation to the field liaison and to the Office of Field Education;
4. Submitting the final performance evaluation signed by the field instructor to the field liaison;
5. Following agency policies and procedures, especially those regarding confidentiality;
6. Abiding by the NASW and State of Texas Codes of Ethics;
7. Adhering to standards and/or guidelines of the agency's monitoring or accrediting bodies;
8. Accepting supervision and responding appropriately to feedback from the field instructor and appropriate agency staff;
9. Consulting with the field instructor *first* if problems occur in the placement, and contacting the field liaison if a resolution cannot be reached;
10. Completing the required minimum number of hours within the academic term;
11. Submitting all evaluations (of the field agency, the field instructor, the field liaison and the Department of Field Instruction) to the Office of Field Education.

Field Schedule, Clock Hours, Absences

Students are expected to negotiate their field schedule (specific days of the week, specific hours, etc.) with the field instructor. A breakdown of the approximate suggested number of hours per week to be spent in field (based on semester) is contained in the "Options and Time Requirements" document.

All students must complete the required number of clock hours regardless of sick time, holiday time, or other missed time. It is the student's responsibility to make

arrangements with the field instructor to make up any lost time. Absence from regular class to attend field or field-related activities is not appropriate, is considered unexcused, and is subject to the attendance policy of the instructor of the class.