Hello and thank you for taking the time to view this Field Placement Search Information Session video! My name is Amanda Campbell and I am an Assistant Director of Field Education within the Office of Field Education at MSU Denver's Department of Social Work. We'll be covering a great deal of information today about field education and the process to search for a field placement.

As you'll see on the screen now, you'll see that our Field Team is comprised of seven individuals who are all dedicated to your success as a student completing field education within our Department of Social Work. As a student who will be entering into their field education portion of their degree during the next academic year, you will be assigned to a Placement Navigator who is one of our team members. They will guide you along your search process and we do encourage you to continually check your email inbox to check for emails from field@msudenver.edu. Email will be the primary way that we communicate with you about the search process, any requirements and any deadlines that you will need to know. Our office is located in Central Classroom 202 and we invite you to stop by anytime.

So we’ll start by talking about what field education is. Field education is commonly referred to as the heart of social work. The Council on Social Work Education, our accrediting body, has designated field education as the signature pedagogy which means that this is the primary way that you will be socialized into the profession of social work. It’s where your classroom learning will truly come to life and you’ll be able to see the evidence of your hard work and studying in those interactions that you have in a community based setting.

Field education is about completing more than just hours of work in the field. It really is thinking critically about what social work values inform my decisions. What social work knowledge am I using as I approach different practice situations? And what skills do I need in a particular situation? So really this is where you’ll be able to apply theoretical knowledge, social work ethics and values into real life settings. And so this is really where social work comes to life.

You will have the opportunity within the field education part of your degree to begin developing your self-awareness and your professional identity. So bringing with you your personality, your past experiences and skills that you have come into the degree with and continuing to take those further as you are doing work within a community based field placement. Additionally you will have the opportunity on a regular basis to integrate theory into practice. And again that’s where all of this will come to life. Collectively this will help you develop into a competent, ethical and effective social worker.

We encourage students to really embrace the journey. Not only as they are searching for their field placement but also when they are completing their field placement and are working out in a community agency. Many individuals come into the social work profession with a general understanding of their interests or areas that they’d like to explore. But you may find that there are some twists and turns along the way that may
point your path in a different direction. Sometimes that means that you may embrace or experience some challenges. We encourage you to lean into those and see those as great opportunities to learn and enhance your skills and your experience as you continue through our program and into your social work career.

So when do you take field education? In our Bachelors of Social Work program, students complete their field education requirements during their senior year. As a part-time student, it would be in their final year of the program. For students in our Masters of Social Work program, you complete two year-long field placements so both in your Foundation year as well as in your Concentration year. Students who come into the MSW program as an Advanced Student because they have already earned their Bachelor of Social Work degree can move into their Concentration year of the program which is designated as Advanced Standing. And so that requires one field placement.

All of the field placements and internships in our program are running two consecutive semesters so they are both fall and then spring semester and concurrently you’ll be taking a field seminar class. So you’ll be completing your field placement or your internship out at an agency and that generally starts at the beginning of the academic year, so in August. And it continues throughout fall semester and into the beginning of May when the spring semester wraps up. The field placement and agency must stay the same all year. Your field seminar class also stays the same with the same instructor for both fall and spring semesters. The instructor for your field seminar class is someone referred to as your Faculty Field Liaison and their role is to help support you not only in your field seminar course but also with your field placement. So that includes completing site visits and helping to check in with you on a regular basis about how your field placement is going.

Your field seminar course will meet every other week over both fall and spring semesters. And for a combination of the field placement and the field seminar course, students who successfully complete both will earn three credits per semester. It is important to know that in these professional field experience courses that you’ll be enrolled in, you must successfully pass the field seminar course with a passing grade on all assignments and attendance at course sessions as well as successfully completing the required number of hours in your field placement and passing a field evaluation.

For our BSSW and Foundation year MSW students, the requirements are that you complete 240 hours for each fall and spring semester. That breaks down to roughly 16 hours per week for the 15 week semesters. And you’ll have a grand total of 480 hours over the course of the two semesters. There are no set days that you have to be completing your field placement. You’ll wind up determining what your weekly schedule looks like with the agency in which you complete the field placement. It is important to begin thinking now about how you may need to adjust your schedule or other requirements in your life to be able to effectively meet the demands of completing these hours out in your internship. We understand that this is a big undertaking and
encourage you to talk with your Placement Navigator if you have concerns as well as reach out to friends, family and loved ones for their support in helping you to be successful in completing these internship hours.

For our Concentration or second year MSW students, the requirement is that you complete 300 hours per semester breaking down to 20 hours a week and a combined total of 600 hours over the course of both fall and spring semesters. Again, there are no set days but that will be determined with your agency in which you are completing your internship.

For our BSSW and Foundation, or first year MSW students, you will have the opportunity to complete a generalist field placement. And what that means is that you’ll have opportunities to work across different levels. So micro, work with individuals; mezzo, work with families and or groups as well as macro. So working with communities or organizations or thinking more systemically about the work you are doing as a social work intern. You will see that there are a variety of learning activities that meet the demands of course requirements. So it could be things like completing psychosocial assessments or providing some supportive counseling. Doing advocacy and crisis intervention. Perhaps at the mezzo level, co-facilitating psychoeducational groups or team meetings. And at the macro level, thinking about areas such as developing training workshops, community outreach, volunteer recruitment and so on.

The common thread for all students in our programs is that you will design a learning agreement that requires that you engage in learning activities that meet the nine social work competencies that are developed by the Council on Social Work Education. Some of those areas are around things like demonstrating ethical and professional behavior, engaging with diversity and difference, advocacy efforts and understanding policy. So everyone in their field placements will have opportunities to work towards meeting those competencies, but the specific learning activities may look slightly different.

For our Concentration year students or Advanced Standing students, there are opportunities to further specialize in a field placement. So there may be one specific level of practice that you want to be working in. And when it comes to curriculum, you have the opportunity within our courses that are offered to choose electives which meet your academic and career goals or to follow one of three pathways. The three pathways are Children and Families, Mental Health or Leadership and Management. Each of those pathways has designated courses that allow you to develop a further depth of understanding on those topics.

Students who are doing their Concentration year placement will also complete their Capstone course while also completing their Field Experience. The Capstone course allows you to do some project based learning and to be able to identify an area of need within your field placement agency and assist them, whether that be doing something like grant writing or developing curriculum or assisting with program evaluation for example.
At the Concentration year level, again, there are opportunities to work at micro, mezzo, or macro levels, but you have the ability to potentially to complete your field placement with an agency that specializes at one of these levels. Perhaps you have an interest in becoming a therapist and so working more directly on advanced clinical assessments and treatment plans and using therapeutic modalities in your work with individuals or families. On the other end of the spectrum, perhaps you have an option to work at a more macro or systemic level doing things like grant writing, social policy, advocacy or organizational leadership.

So now that we’ve talked about the overall structure of field education, I will review the general timeline for your search process. MSU Denver is a program that does empower students to be engaged in sharing what their interests and past experiences are in helping to identify some potential field placement agencies. It does require that you are doing some research and actually applying to agencies and going through an interview process once you and your Placement Navigator have determined the right agencies for you.

The first part of the journey is for students to attend an information session or to complete watching this video which meets that requirement. Beginning in the middle of December, students will have access to the field application which is available on our Sonia Field Database. For current students, that application is due January 15th, 2020. For newly admitted students who will be admitted to the MSW program in the beginning of 2020, that application will be due at a later date in the spring. During this time, it’s a great opportunity to reflect on past work, skills, volunteer experiences as that will help to guide your search and answer questions in the field application. The field application is submitted to your assigned Placement Navigator so that they can understand how to best support your search. Students will then sign up for an individual meeting to discuss placement options with their Placement Navigator. Those meeting sign-ups are done through our Sonia Field Database which all enrolled students entering into field will get access to.

At that field meeting, students will discuss some possible agencies that they are interested in applying to. Students do have the option of doing some searching through the Sonia Field Database which houses the information for all of our screened and approved agencies. It is important to note that all agencies must be screened and approved by the Field Office in order to be eligible to be a field placement site. Once students have gotten their three placement sites that they are interested in applying to signed off or approved by the Placement Navigator. They will get a referral to those agencies. Again students will be referred to a maximum of three agencies to which they can apply initially. If students are not able to find a field placement upon applying to those three agencies, they can talk with their Placement Navigator about additional options.

In order to prepare yourself to apply for your field placement, you should begin working on your résumé and cover letter and doing research on the selected agencies. Students
may begin actively applying to agencies by submitting a cover letter and résumé to the agency contacts beginning on February 5th, 2020. We encourage students to apply to agencies as early as possible after that February 5th deadline but knowing that many agencies have varying timelines and will be accepting applications throughout the spring and into early summer. We encourage students to then interview at least one or two agencies to be able to mutually determine if an agency is a good fit. Please do keep your Placement Navigator about how your search is going – where you’re finding successes and if you’re encountering any challenges. We are here to support you.

Once you have been offered an internship with an agency and decide to accept it, you will complete the offer process in Sonia Field Database. More information about those details will be sent out later in the spring. We then ask students to complete a Field Confirmation Form in the Sonia Field Database – the priority deadline being May 29th, 2020. All students will need to have their Field Confirmation Form completed no later than July 3rd, 2020.

In getting ready for your field experience, you will attend a mandatory student field orientation in August 2020 and more information will be sent out closer to that date. And then field placements begin the week of August 17th, 2020.

On the screen now you will see a picture of what our Sonia Field Database looks like as well as the link to be able to access that online. All enrolled students who are going to be entering field in fall of 2020 will receive information about how to log in to the database as well as complete the field application, sign up for a placement meeting with your Placement Navigator, as well as be able to search through the list of agencies currently partnering with MSU Denver.

Some tips for success as you think about your search for a field placement:

We do encourage you to do your research, learn about agencies by viewing their website and reviewing their descriptions in the Sonia Field Database. We know you may have an idea of the types of placement that may be a good fit for you which is wonderful and we want to honor that.

We also ask you to be open to unexpected settings or unfamiliar populations as these can often lead to some of the greatest growth.

Get support from others, not only those who are in our Field Office, but your faculty advisor and the Classroom-to-Career Hub, the Writing Center. They are all resources available to you to assist with completing your résumé, updating your cover letter, practicing interviewing skills and generally providing support as you go through this process.

The field placement search process as well as your field placement next year are opportunities to further develop or refine your professional reputation. And so for that reason it is very important that you are being professional in all of your communication and presentation in your interactions with our community partners and your colleagues.
We do encourage you to apply to your three referred agencies on or very soon after February 5th whenever possible. Again, we know that some MSW students will be admitted to the program later on in the spring of 2020 and there are still plenty of agencies that have their timelines for accepting applications and interviewing available well beyond that date. So please don’t fear.

Be patient with agencies after you apply. Recognize that they do have other tasks and responsibilities that they are following up on. But it is also okay to do some professional follow up and outreach after you have submitted your initial cover letter and résumé if you have not heard from an agency within a week or two.

And again, please stay in touch with your Placement Navigator. They will be your greatest resource and biggest cheerleader along the way.

One of the defining features of field placements or internships within social work degree programs is that you have access to ongoing and regular supervision by someone who is called your Field Instructor. Field Instructors are social workers who meet the following qualifications to be able to supervise students at the agency. So for our BSSW students, they must have a field instructor who has either a BSW or MSW degree and at least two years of post-degree work experience. For our MSW students, you must have a Field Instructor that has a MSW degree at a minimum and at least two years of post-degree work experience. You as a student will be meeting for one hour every week during the course of your internship with your Field Instructor for supervision. This is where you’ll be able to talk about your work from a social work lens and be able to really hone in on your own professional development.

For agencies where there is not someone with that required educational background or years of experience, there are opportunities for you to have what is called a Task Supervisor. Not all students will have a Task Supervisor. But those are used if there is either a Field Instructor who is not able to provide regular day-to-day oversight over your activities as a student. And in those cases, then you would meet with your Task Supervisor on a regular basis as well as meet with the Field Instructor every week to be able to process your learning. In other cases, agencies may not have a social worker on staff and so the Field Office can help to identify an Off-Site Field Instructor who will work your Task Supervisor to both support your learning and growth. In those cases, Task Supervisors complete an hour of supervision a week with students and Off-Site Field Instructors meet every other week during the course of the two semesters for supervision.

Some students are interested in exploring employment-based field placements. These are an exception rather than the rule, but they are something that works for some students who are already working in a social work related position. Students must have been employed at their employment agency at least three months prior to the July 15th application deadline. All agencies where students are interested in completing an employment-based field placement must be screened by the Field Office. And they
have to agree to our program requirements. Our key priority is that you as a student have opportunities to be a student learner and to engage in new tasks and responsibilities to help you grow and develop. And so for that reason, students completing employment-based field placements must be engaged in new learning, separate from their current job duties. So perhaps a different program or working in a new role that you haven’t done before. Students must also have a different Field Instructor from whom their employment supervisor is so that you are not having anyone supervising you in dual roles. And you must also be able to arrange your schedule to complete your internship hours in blocks of time at least four hours or more. If this is something that you are interested in possibly pursuing, please check your emails as you will be receiving information about employment-based information sessions which begin in January 2020 and will continue through the spring. Students must attend one of those sessions in order to access the employment-based field application and ensure that they are able to meet those program requirements.

For students who are interested in looking for other opportunities that may provide some funding, there is the Child Welfare Stipend which is open to both BSSW and MSW students. This is a great program especially for individuals wanting to learn about working with children, youth and families and who have a goal of working within a county department of human services after graduation. There is a competitive program for the stipend and so it does require an application and interview process. Students who receive the stipend can receive funding anywhere from $3,250 to $13,000. As a recipient of the Child Welfare Stipend, you would be required to complete your field experience or your internship within a county based child welfare agency. And the Child Welfare Stipend committee will work with these students to help place them within a county department of human services. As a part of the internship, students would attend the new caseworker Fundamentals Training also known as “The Academy”. And there is a commitment to work for one year as a paid staff in a county department of human services or tribal child welfare agency for each year you receive the stipend. That requirement must happen in the State of Colorado as well. There are more details about the Child Welfare Stipend as well as the application on the main social work website. Applications are due by midnight on Thursday, February 20th, and there are opportunities to attend informational sessions listed on the screen and also available on the website. Please feel free to reach out to Lara Bruce should you have any questions about the Child Welfare Stipend.

One last opportunity that is open to our Concentration year students is the HRSA General Integrative Care Stipend. Again this is only for those Concentration or Advanced standing students in the MSW program. And for those students who are interested in working with clients in behavioral health settings in rural or medically underserved populations across the lifespan. There is an application and interview process that interested students would go through and if awarded this grant, students would receive a $10,000 a year stipend and be required to complete their field placement in a HRSA-eligible site. What that means is that there must be an emphasis
on rural or medically underserved populations and it must provide inter-professional learning experiences. Additionally, settings that align well with the HRSA grant are those that provide interventions with families, integrated primary care settings, problem solving court settings and those agencies that serve multilingual and multicultural populations. There is a requirement to remain in Colorado working within a HRSA-eligible agency for one year post graduation.

This is another stipend that students can apply through the social work department and information is located on our website under “Scholarships and Stipends”. The first round of these applications are due January 17th with the second round to be released later in the spring. There is an interview process if selected and accepted students will work with their Placement Navigator to determine HRSA-eligible agencies to apply to.

We’ve covered a great deal of information within this information session today, but there is much more information on our website as well that we encourage you to review. In particular, pay attention to the Frequently Asked Questions located on the Office of Field Education’s Field Placement Search Process page. Please contact field@msudenver.edu or call us at 303.615.1655 with any questions. We thank you for viewing this video and look forward to working with you!