



Field Education Frequently Asked Questions 2023-2024 Academic Year

This document addresses many common questions that students have related to field education and the field placement search process. For access to a comprehensive guide to all field education policies, students are encouraged to review the Field Manual available on the Office of Field Education website at: <https://www.msudenver.edu/social-work/field-education/student-field-journey/>

General Internship Requirements

1. *What are the requirements for the Field Experience course?*

Each Field Experience course is divided into two required components:

- a. Field Placement (aka Internship) in Agency
- b. Field Experience Courses

2. *When, during my BSSW or MSW degree program do I take the Field Experience course?*

In order to enroll in any Field Experience course, you must have completed all required pre-requisites in the assigned course sequence. The Field Experience courses are a two-semester sequence – meaning they are designed to be completed consecutively (Fall/Spring) in the same academic year. They are designed to be completed either alongside or after your Practice courses have been completed. Please refer to the advising snapshots on our [website](#) for more information and to ensure you are following the prescribed course sequence.

3. *How do BSSW/MSW Foundation year placements differ from MSW Concentration year placements?*

BSSW and MSW Foundation year internships offer opportunities for the development of **generalist** social work practice. In the BSSW and Foundation years, you will develop a base of core social work knowledge, values, and skills and identify opportunities for exposure at all system levels (individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations). BSSW and MSW Foundation year students are expected to have opportunities to demonstrate their generalist practice skills of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation, whether this be at the individual level or with larger client systems.

The MSW Concentration year internship will offer opportunities for the development of **advanced** social work practice. It will focus on more specialized clinical, mezzo or macro skills, depending on your area of interest and career goals. The concentration year internship will also allow for increasingly autonomous practice and more purposeful selection of interventions based on application of advanced theoretical knowledge.

4. *I have several years of social work experience. Can this count towards my field hours?*

No credit will be given for prior life or work experience. The Professional Field Experience is designed to provide a well-rounded practical educational experience that complements the academic curriculum.

5. *What is the difference between a Field Instructor, Faculty Field Liaison, etc.?*

Field Instructor (FI) - a staff member at the field placement agency who is responsible for providing students with at least **one hour a week of supervision**. FI's must have a BSW/MSW and at least two years of post-graduate work experience in the field of social work. FI's are responsible for ensuring that the student is provided with learning assignments, tasks, and experiences that integrate social work theory, values, and practice.

Task Supervisor (TS) - a staff member at the field placement agency who may be responsible for supervising the day-to-day activities of the student during the internship. The Task Supervisor does NOT have to have a social work degree – they may have a related degree OR work experience in the field. The Task Supervisor typically assumes a teaching role in skill development. The TS must work in conjunction with the FI to provide constructive feedback. Supervision time with a Task Supervisor must be supplemented with required supervision time with a Field Instructor. While all students must have a Field Instructor, not all students will have a Task Supervisor.

Off-Site Field Instructor (OSFI) - a social worker in the community with a BSW/MSW degree who volunteers to supervise students in agency settings that do not have a qualified social work Field Instructor on staff. The OSFI may be identified by the agency or with the assistance of MSU Denver's Social Work Department. OSFI's provide one hour of supervision every other week. Their role in supervision is to infuse the social work perspective by helping the student to link social work knowledge, values, and skills learned in the classroom to the student's practice. They provide space for a student to understand the client better, become more aware of their own reactions and responses, understand interactional dynamics, examine interventions and explore alternate ways of working with client situations, etc. OSFI's do NOT have any direct oversight over the care or treatment of clients and are not responsible for task assignment, policies or functions of the agency. If a student utilizes an OSFI, they must also have supervision by an on-site (agency employed) Task Supervisor.

Faculty Field Liaison (FFL) - a member of the Department's faculty who teaches the field seminar and provides a link between the agency, student, and school. The Faculty Field Liaison remains in regular contact with the student and the agency supervisor (Field Instructor/Task Supervisor) to monitor that placement learning objectives are being met, ensure academic curriculum is infused with practice in the field, and assist with mediating any conflicts that may occur in the field. The Faculty Field Liaison is also responsible for leading the Field Seminar and providing 2-3 in-person site visits per year to each student's agency.

Field Seminar - the biweekly class led by the Faculty Field Liaison, that allows students to process their field experience, integrate class work and agency practice, and develop as Social Work professionals. The Field Seminar may be held on-campus, online, or in a hybrid model.

Office of Field Education - faculty and staff of the Social Work Department that are responsible for securing agencies for field placement, matching students with appropriate placements, training Field Instructors, and developing all field education policies, procedures, and evaluations. The Office of Field Education may also help mediate conflicts that occur in the field. If you have any questions, please email field@msudenver.edu.

HOURS AND SCHEDULING

6. *How many hours will I spend in my agency Field Placement / Internship?*

Students will be in their field placements for 30 weeks from the start of the fall semester (August) until the end of the spring semester (May).

BSSW Year Students:	13-14 hours/week (400 hours/year; 200 hours/semester)
MSW Foundation Year Students:	13-14 hours/week (400 hours/year; 200 hours/semester)
MSW Concentration Year Students:	16-17 hours/week (500 hours/year; 250 hours/semester)

7. *Can my placement be arranged for evening/weekend hours?*

Your field placement is designed to take place during regular business hours when your Task Supervisor/Field Instructor are regularly employed and available for supervision.

Note: lunch breaks do not count towards your required internship hours.

Some agencies may require specific trainings/work hours outside the regularly scheduled business hours for field placement. It is up to you and your Field Instructor to specify work hours before your field placement begins. While certain agencies may have evening groups or other opportunities that allow you to complete your required hours during evenings and weekends, this cannot be guaranteed and may limit the number or type of available agencies in which to complete your field placement. While we understand that students may have outside financial/family commitments, no excuses from completing required field placement hours will be granted. It is up to the student to arrange their schedule to ensure completion of all required coursework and field placement hours.

8. *Can I start my internship before school starts?*

Placement hours should be spread over the course of each full semester in order to allow the students to experience the placement concurrent with the content of classes (versus early completion of hours). At times, field placement agencies may require an earlier start date than the first week of classes. If you and your agency agree to an earlier start date, you must submit a request to the Office of Field Education through the Field Confirmation Form for permission prior to beginning your placement. Requests for early starts must include a rationale for the request of an earlier start date. In cases where this request is approved, students may accrue up to, but no more than 40 field placement hours during the summer.

Students who accrue hours prior to the start of the semester are not permitted to 'bank' hours and end their field placement early. Extra hours **may** be used to lighten the load during the semester at times **with agency supervisor approval**. However, as a general rule, students are to maintain a steady accrual of required hours throughout the semester. Students are required to be in their field placement until the end of each semester.

9. *Will I be required to work over holidays and school breaks?*

Students are not required by the university to be in placement during regularly scheduled school holidays and school breaks. School holidays may differ from agency holidays. In these cases, students must arrange their work schedule in coordination with their agency supervisors. While students may work extended hours over the Winter Break, they may not terminate from their field placements before May. This may mean students will accrue more hours than required.

APPLICATION AND PLACEMENT PROCESS

10. *What is the process to obtain a field placement?*

Students work with a Placement Navigator from the Office of Field Education in the spring, before their internship begins, to identify whether they will go through a **traditional internship search**, in which students apply to up to five potential field agencies, OR if they would like to **request an employment-based internship**.

- **Traditional Internship Search:** Students utilize Sonia Field Database in consultation with their assigned Placement Navigator to assist them in selecting and being referred to up to five potential agencies.
 - o BSSW and MSW Foundation and Advanced Standing students are required to meet with their Placement Navigator before being referred to agencies.
 - o MSW Concentration students who would like assistance in selecting field placement options may request a meeting with their Placement Navigator from the Field Office. Alternately, Concentration students may choose to preference their top five agencies and notify their Placement Navigator via email if they do not wish to have an individual meeting.

- o The **student will apply to each agency requesting an interview on or after February 13th, 2023** by submitting a cover letter and résumé. These interviews are to be treated as professional job interviews. This is a two-way process; agencies may offer or deny an internship to a student, and a student may also determine whether the agency will be able to meet their learning requirements for a field placement for a developmentally appropriate internship.
- o Under NO circumstances may a student interview with an agency without being referred by their Placement Navigator.
- **Employment-Based Internship:** Students may request that their employer consider an Employment-Based (EB) internship (see questions 16 and 17 below for more information). Students are encouraged to discuss their interest in a potential EB internship with their Placement Navigator and their employer as early in the search process as possible.
 - o The process to request approval for an EB internship is different than the process of interviewing for traditional internships. Students requesting EB internships need to complete additional documentation to demonstrate that their EB internship will meet all requirements related to supervision and development of social work competencies.
 - o Students interested in requesting approval for an EB internship will indicate this when they complete their Field Application in Sonia. They will then receive detailed instructions on the next steps.
 - o A meeting will need to be held between the student, their supervisor, the agency's internship coordinator, and/or an employee with social work degree who may serve as the student's Field Instructor. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss whether the EB internship request will be approved by the employer, and if so, to make sure everyone agrees on a plan for how the EB internship will be structured.
 - o The student's employer may also require students requesting an EB internship to submit a resume/cover letter or complete an interview.
- **Finalizing the Internship:** Once an agency offers a student an internship and/or the employment-based internship is approved by the Office of Field Education, and the student accepts, the student must finalize their internship by completing an official Field Confirmation Form through the Sonia Field Database and submit it to the Office of Field Education. The internship is not considered finalized until the Field Confirmation Form is completed by both student and agency.

11. Can I contact agencies before February 13th, 2023?

No, you may not contact any agencies before February 13th, 2023 unless you have received express permission from your Placement Navigator! This is only granted in cases where agencies require an earlier application deadline.

12. Does the University complete a background check on me prior to entering field placement?

The University does not complete background checks on any student. Each agency is responsible for determining if and how background checks are completed on students, and what the eligibility criteria are. Each agency has different criteria for what is or is not permissible in a criminal background. If you are concerned about undergoing a background check and how it may affect your internship search, please contact your Placement Navigator or the Office of Field Education to discuss this in more detail.

13. If I accept a field placement at an agency, but then another agency unexpectedly contacts me for an interview, can I switch my placement?

No. Once you make a commitment to accept an internship at an agency, you must honor that commitment. Failure to do so is unethical and reflects poorly on you as a professional, damages the relationship between the agency and the University, unfairly takes away a potential opportunity from another student, and puts the agency in a position to either lose an intern that they were planning on for the year or re-invest more time and energy into another intern search.

Any student who does not honor a commitment (written or verbal) to an agency, may be required to go through the Field Support Process and may be required to defer their field placement or may be dismissed from the program. See the Field Manual on our [website](#) for additional details.

14. What happens if I am unable to secure a placement within one of the agencies provided to me by the Office of Field Education?

Students have a responsibility to:

- contact **each** agency provided to them within at least ten days of receiving the agency's contact information.
- submit a professionally crafted résumé and cover letter customized to each agency to request an interview.
- adhere to the [Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior](#) in all communications with the agency.

If a student is not selected for an interview at any agency or is not offered an internship after interviewing at all provided agencies, the student **must** contact their Placement Navigator at the Office of Field Education to determine next steps as soon as possible.

If a student is unable to obtain an internship due to issues with abiding by the [Standards of Professional and Ethical Behavior](#), then the student may be required to participate in the Student Support Process and may be required to defer their field placement or may be dismissed from the program.

TYPES OF AGENCIES AND PLACEMENTS

15. *Are there any paid internships?*

Yes, there are some paid internship opportunities! Agencies are encouraged to offer financial compensation to their interns; however, not all agencies are able to do so. Most field placements are not paid – however, there are a few select agencies that will provide students with a stipend or some form of compensation. Additionally, students are encouraged to review information on available stipends or scholarships (along with specific requirements and criteria) offered through the Department of Social Work on the [department's website](#).

Paid internships are not the same as Employment-Based (EB) internships. A paid internship is a traditional internship that offers some kind of payment/stipend. One way to tell the difference is that a traditional internship is temporary and follows the semester schedule and academic year (starts in August and ends in May); but in an EB internship the student is a permanent employee who continues with the agency past the end of the internship.

16. *Can I complete my field placement at my place of employment?*

Students may request that their employer consider an Employment-Based (EB) internship. There are many potential benefits to EB internships, including increased work/life balance and financial stability.

It is important to note that agencies are not required to approve EB internship requests, and each agency can decide whether or not they allow EB internships. Students are advised to approach this conversation with their employers carefully and to reflect on the factors that might influence the employer's decision (e.g. How long have I worked in my current job? Am I in good standing as an employee? How strong is my professional relationship with my supervisor? Does my employer have an existing social work internship program? Are there any other employees with a social work degree?)

There are different ways to structure EB internships, so it is best for the student and their employer to discuss openly and collaboratively what the pros/cons might be and would work best for each student's unique situation. Consider the following scenarios:

- o Students may need to add supplemental learning activities outside of their current job duties in order to meet all nine social work competencies and/or to provide professional development opportunities that align with the student's career goals.
- o Employers may ask students to complete their internship in a different program/department than their current job.
- o Employers may require students to apply for one of their existing traditional internships.
- o Students may need to modify their work schedule to accommodate their internship requirements; this should be discussed and agreed upon with their supervisor.

EB internships are most successful when the student's employer is fully willing and able to support the student's learning and provide a meaningful learning environment conducive to professional growth.

Students should understand that by requesting an EB internship, that means making a commitment to maintain their employment until the end of the academic year (August thru May). If anything changes with their employment status, this may impact their internship experience.

Another consideration for students requesting an EB internship is how to balance the dual role of being both an employee and an intern within the same agency. Employers may have different expectations for their employees than their interns. Navigating this dual role can sometimes create additional complexities.

The decision to request an EB internship should be carefully considered in advance. Students are encouraged to discuss a potential EB internship request with their Placement Navigator.

17. *Can I search for a new job in hopes that it could become an Employment-Based (EB) internship?*

Students who are actively job searching and/or get a new job offer may request that their new employer consider allowing an EB internship. This is possible although it is relatively rare. There are a few considerations for students to keep in mind:

- Not all employers allow new employees to count their job as their internship; this should be discussed upfront during the interview process and prior to accepting the job. Students should never assume that their employer will approve an EB internship request.
- There is no specific listing or database for EB internships. Students are encouraged to cross-reference a job posting with the Sonia database to see if that agency is already an approved social work internship partner of MSU-Denver. If not, the agency would need to go through the New Agency Affiliation process to be screened by the Office of Field Education before the EB internship could be approved. Students should be aware that this process takes time and may cause delays in the EB internship approval process.
- It is recommended that a student starts any new job to be requested as an EB internship **at least three months** prior to the start of the semester (e.g. students should begin the new job no later than mid-May prior to the semester/EB internship starting in mid-August).

18. *Can I design my own placement?*

Field placements are designed to be completed in one agency. It is not acceptable to piece together learning activities from various agencies to comprise an internship. In very rare cases, the Office of Field Education may approve an exception. Please contact your Placement Navigator if you would like to discuss a unique circumstance that may require such approval. Students are encouraged to indicate on their Field Application if they have a request for a specific field placement. The Placement Navigator will take these requests into account when providing each student with placement options. **However, not all specific requests for agency placements will be honored.**

Efforts will be made to match students with desired settings, populations, etc., but the main focus of the field experience is to foster a learning experience where a student can integrate theory and practice. Each student will be provided placement options where they can demonstrate prescribed competencies required by the program in an approved setting.

19. I am interested in a specific agency. Can I contact that agency to see if they will accept interns?

In order to maintain the integrity of the placement process that is used for hundreds of students, and to preserve ongoing relationships with field agencies, students are not to contact any agencies to propose placements or inquire about availability. If a student would like to suggest an agency be added to the database of affiliated field placements, contact your Placement Navigator to discuss whether or not this is an option. As stated above, efforts will be made to match students with desired settings, populations, etc., but the main focus of the field experience is to foster a learning experience where a student can integrate theory and practice.

20. Can I complete my field placement in two different agencies in one year (One agency during the fall semester, and another agency during the spring semester)?

No. Students must complete their placement in the same agency for the entire year (30 weeks). Additionally, students are not allowed to split their internship between two agencies. In order to form a sound knowledge base, develop rapport with clients, establish yourself as an integral part of the agency, and complete learning objectives, longevity in one field placement is required.

21. Can I complete my internship at an agency that does not have a qualified social work degreed person on staff available for supervision?

Maybe. In select agencies, students may be supervised daily by a member of the staff who does not hold a BSW/MSW degree. This person will be referred to as a Task Supervisor. However, a Field Instructor with a BSW/MSW degree, and two years of post-graduate experience must also be identified to provide at least one hour of supervision every other week. This Field Instructor may be a board member, a staff member of a closely related agency, or another person with significant knowledge and understanding of the field placement agency. The Office of Field Education will work with agencies to devise an appropriate supervision model prior to referring students for placement.

Supervision Options

Option 1:	One hour of weekly supervision from an on-site Field Instructor AND →	NO TASK SUPERVISOR
Option 2:	One hour of supervision every other week (more if needed) from an on-site Field Instructor AND →	One hour of supervision every other week (or weekly) from an on-site Task Supervisor
Option 3	One hour of supervision every other week (more if needed) from an OFF-SITE Field Instructor AND →	One hour of supervision weekly from an on-site Task Supervisor
<p>Note: Supervision may be a combination of individual and group, depending on the learning style and needs of the student. It is strongly recommended that <u>at least 50% of all supervision hours should be individual</u>. When group supervision models are used, the Task Supervisor and/or Field Instructor should be available to meet individually as needed throughout the semester, depending on the student's level and learning needs, for the purposes of establishing a trusted relationship and addressing any differentiated learning needs.</p>		

22. Can I use the same field agency for my placement in both my BSSW/MSW Foundation and MSW Concentration year?

In most situations, your Concentration year field placement will be different than either Foundation year or your BSSW placement. Please contact your Placement Navigator or the Office of Field Education if you would like to discuss a special circumstance that may require approval for the same placement. There are some agencies that have longitudinal placements

that are set up for two years and will be determined by the agency. You would need to complete a request for same agency placement which prompts you to identify new learning opportunities and a different supervisor for each year. These requests are reviewed by the Office of Field Education.

23. Are any placements available in private psychotherapy clinic settings?

While social workers may choose to work in a private clinic after obtaining their licensure, these settings are generally not available for field placements. One of the requirements of a field placement agency is that they pay particular attention to the needs of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and/or living in poverty and that they provide learning opportunities to engage in social justice work in an agency based setting. BSSW and MSW Foundation year placements must also provide access to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with many system levels (individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.) Select private psychotherapy clinics may be suitable for field placements and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Office of Field Education. In order to meet the goals of field learning experience, private practices that wish to be approved should meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrate a commitment to serving vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, and/or diverse populations by accepting varied payment options such as Medicaid, sliding-scales, etc.
- Engage with multiple external points of contact within the larger social service delivery system (e.g. schools, courts, human services, etc.).
- Articulate a defined mission and agency policies and procedures.
- Utilize a structured intake process.
- Employ at least two practitioners, one of whom is a social worker with at least 2 years of post-degree work experience.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in differing treatment modalities (ex- individual, couple, family, group).
- Serve a need in the community; address a social issue/problem affecting the community.
- Provide a learning environment where students progress on a continuum that begins with opportunities to shadow/observe social work practice and move towards more independent practice.

OTHER COMMON QUESTIONS

24. I have never worked with a client. Will I be prepared to work with clients in my internship?

As a part of your professional social work development, it may be natural to feel unprepared at various points during your educational journey. You have been admitted to the Social Work Program based on possessing certain abilities and attributes that are necessary to become a successful social worker. Your coursework will assist you in acquiring the practice knowledge necessary to work in a placement setting. Additionally, you will be able to utilize various models of supervision in your field placement (observation, role-playing, co-counseling, processing, etc.) to learn and refine your skills.

25. Will I need a car in my field placement?

All students are required to find their own transportation to and from their field placement. Students without cars will be assisted with finding an agency that is accessible by public transportation (no more than a one-hour commute time each way). Some agencies will require that students have access to their own transportation for the purposes of home visits, community work, etc. It is up to the student to inquire about the agency's vehicle requirements during the interview process. Each agency will have its own policies regarding proof of driver's license and insurance. Students' use of personal or agency vehicles will not be covered under the University's insurance, nor will the Department reimburse students for the use of their vehicles. All issues in regards to transportation, including the transportation of clients, must be discussed between the student and the agency supervisor prior to beginning placement. The Department will not be responsible for any decisions in regards to transportation in the field.

26. Will I be covered under University liability insurance during my internship?

Yes, the work that you complete in your internship as part of the Field Experience class will be covered under University liability insurance in accordance with Colorado State Statute. A small number of agencies may require students to purchase liability insurance with limits beyond what the Colorado State Statute covers. Students in these situations should contact the Office of Field Education for information on how to proceed.

27. What if I am not satisfied with my placement at any point during my internship?

The Office of Field Education is committed to ensuring that students are placed in quality learning environments in order to complete their field experience. However, there may be times in which problems arise during a field placement. It is best that these issues are addressed openly and immediately. Issues may be brought forth by the student, Field Instructor/Task Supervisor, Field Liaison, or Office of Field Education. In any circumstance, the Field Performance Review Process on the Social Work website should be followed. Students may not end an internship without going through the problem resolution process.

If after utilizing the steps outlined in the problem resolution process, a resolution cannot be facilitated, the following possible actions may occur as a result of the Field Performance Review Process:

- The placement is terminated and the student is moved to a different field placement agency or different field instructor within the same agency, often with additional requirements for the student to adequately facilitate the transition.
- The placement is terminated and the student is not permitted to re-enter field until certain conditions have been met.
- The student receives a failing "F" grade in the Field Experience course.
- The student is counseled out of the program.

28. Can I begin working on my hours towards licensure in my field placement?

No. Hours toward licensure as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) cannot begin until full completion of an accredited Master of Social Work program.

29. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted field placements and how is the Office of Field Education supporting agencies and students in adjusting field placements?

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact how students, agencies, clients and communities engage in day-to-day activities including the completion of internships. MSU Denver and the Office of Field Education are committed to supporting robust learning experiences in field education through partnership with community agencies. In order to support students, agencies and supervisors, the Office of Field Education has utilized a variety of supports in collaboration with CSWE and Departmental guidelines, including the inclusion of remote/virtual/telehealth services in approved learning activities. The Office of Field Education continues to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on internships and will communicate about any policy changes and/or supplemental learning opportunities for future academic years as needed. All students are expected to follow MSU Denver COVID protocols while in their field placements. We encourage our students to stay in communication with our Office of Field Education should they have any questions, concerns or feedback about engaging in field placements given the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Office of Field Education is excited for you to begin your internship search and we look forward to supporting you throughout your journey in field education!