



Field Education Frequently Asked Questions for Students 2024-2025 Academic Year

This document addresses many common questions that students have related to field education and the internship 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 Internship
- b. Field Experience Class

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 internships differ from MSW Concentration year internships?

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. Who will supervise my internship? And what is the difference between a Field Instructor, Faculty Field Liaison, etc.?

Field Instructor (FI) - a staff member at the internship 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 internship 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 is assigned 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 experience class 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 internship 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 Experience Class and providing 2-3 in-person site visits per year to each student's agency.

Field class - the biweekly field experience 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 class 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 internship, 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 internship?

Students will be in their internships 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 internship be arranged for evening/weekend hours?

Your internship 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 internship. It is up to you and your Field Instructor to specify work hours before your internship 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 internship. While we understand that students may have outside financial/family commitments, no excuses from completing required internship hours will be granted. It is up to the student to arrange their schedule to ensure completion of all required coursework and internship hours.

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

Internship hours should be spread over the course of each full semester in order to allow the students to experience the internship concurrent with the content of classes (versus early completion of hours). In rare circumstances, internship agencies may require an earlier start date than the first week of classes. If you and your agency would like to request 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 internship. Retroactive requests to start early and accrue internship hours will not be approved.

Requests for early starts must include a rationale for the request of an earlier start date. The only approved tasks for early starts of student internships are participating in agency orientations and other on-boarding or training related activities. Direct practice with clients is not an approved activity for early starts. In cases where this request is approved, students may accrue up to, but no more than 40 internship hours during the summer.

Students who accrue hours prior to the start of the semester are not permitted to 'bank' hours and end their internship 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 internship 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 internship 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 internships before May. This may mean students will accrue more hours than required.

APPLICATION AND SEARCH PROCESS

10. *What is the process to obtain an internship?*

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 internship options may request a meeting with their Placement Navigator from the Field Office. Alternately, Concentration students may choose to preference their top five pre-approved 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 12th, 2024**, 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).
 - 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 are encouraged to begin the process to request an EB internship as early in the search process as possible.
 - o Students interested in requesting approval for an EB internship should indicate this on their Field Application in the Sonia database. They will then receive detailed instructions on the next steps, including the EB FAQ and the EB Step-By-Step Instructions will be provided to the student. The student is expected to carefully read both of these documents and discuss any questions with their Placement Navigator.
- **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 12th, 2024?

No, you may not contact any agencies before February 12th, 2024 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 internship?

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 an internship at an agency, but then another agency unexpectedly contacts me for an interview, can I switch my internship?

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 an internship 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 internship or may be dismissed from the program.

TYPES OF AGENCIES AND INTERNSHIPS

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. While most internships 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 internship 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. The decision to request an EB internship should be carefully considered:

- It is important for students to note that agencies are not required to approve EB internship requests, and each agency can decide whether or not (and if so under what circumstances) 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.
- 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. 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.
- An important 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.
- 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 through May). If anything changes with their employment status, this may impact their internship experience.

For additional details, please see the EB Internship FAQs and/or the EB Request Step-By-Step Instructions, which will be provided to all students who indicate interest in an EB internship on their Field Application at the beginning of the search cycle. Please direct any specific questions regarding EB internships to your Placement Navigator.

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

On occasion students are actively job searching and/or get a new job offer during the internship search process. Students may consider requesting that their new employer approve 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 new employer will approve an EB internship request. Students must follow all of the EB Request Step-By-Step Instructions
- 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 as much as three months 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).

For additional details, please see the EB Internship FAQs and/or the EB Request Step-By-Step Instructions, which will be provided to all students who indicate interest in an EB internship on their Field Application at the beginning of the search cycle. Please direct any specific questions regarding EB internships to your Placement Navigator.

18. Can I design my own internship?

Internships 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 internship. The Placement Navigator will take these requests into account when providing each student with agency options. **However, not all specific requests for agency internships 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 internship options where they can demonstrate prescribed competencies required by the program in an approved setting.

19. I am interested in a specific agency OR an agency that is not a current partner of the Dept. of Social Work. Can I contact that agency to see if they will accept interns?

In order to maintain the integrity of the internship search 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 internships or inquire about availability without consultation with their Placement Navigator. The Office of Field Education prioritizes connecting students searching for internships with its established, pre-approved agency partners during the internship search process. To that end, students are strongly encouraged to work with their Placement Navigator to apply to existing agencies by searching through the Sonia Field Database.

Requests to search outside of existing, established partners are considered on a case-by-case basis and only when one or more of the following conditions apply:

- The student lives in a geographic area without established agency partners.
- The student is seeking an internship in an area/field of social work where there are not existing established relationships.
- The student is already employed at an agency where they would like to request to complete an Employment-Based Internship.

In cases where a student would like to apply to a specific agency that is not a current established partner of the Department of Social Work’s Office of Field Education but that does not meet one or more of the above parameters, students must first apply to at least 2 agencies within their geographic region that would offer similar learning experiences.

The process to screen and onboard a new agency can take up to three months and approval is not guaranteed. Please note that requests to develop a new agency partnership must be completed by August 1st – the deadline for students to have finalized their internship with the Office of Field Education. No new agency affiliations will be allowed after that date.

20. Can I complete my internship 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 internship 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 internship agency 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 internship in both my BSSW/MSW Foundation and MSW Concentration year?

In most situations, your Concentration year internship agency will be different than either Foundation year or your BSSW internship agency. 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 an internship within the same agency. There are some agencies that have longitudinal internships that are set up for two years and will be determined by the agency. You would need to complete a request for same agency internship which prompts you to identify new learning opportunities reflecting advanced practice skills and/or a different supervisor for each year. These requests are reviewed by the Office of Field Education.

23. *Are any internships 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 internships. One of the requirements of our community partnerships is providing social work services to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty”. (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008)

Select private psychotherapy clinics may be suitable for MSW Concentration year internships 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 an agency 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 internship?*

All students are required to find their own transportation to and from their internship. 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 regard to transportation,

including the transportation of clients, must be discussed between the student and the agency supervisor prior to beginning the internship. The Department will not be responsible for any decisions in regard to transportation in the field.

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

The work that students complete in any unpaid internship as part of the Field Experience class will be covered under MSU Denver's liability insurance in accordance with Colorado State Statute. In cases where students are completing paid internships and are not otherwise employed by the agency, then the university covers liability insurance. In cases where students are completing an employment-based internship and their internship duties are the same as their employment role, the employment agency's liability insurance covers the student's work. Additional details are provided in the affiliation agreement signed between MSU Denver's Dept. of Social Work and the agency. Rarely, an agency may require students to purchase liability insurance with limits beyond what the Colorado State Statute covers. Requirements to purchase additional liability insurance should be communicated directly to the student early in the internship search process and may impact the coverage provided by MSU Denver's liability insurance.

27. *What if I am not satisfied with my internship 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 an internship. 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 Support Process on the [Social Work website](#) should be followed. Students may not end an internship without going through the Field Support process. Students are responsible for having reviewed the full Field Support Process in the [Field Manual](#).

28. *Can I begin working on my hours towards licensure in my internship?*

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

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!

If you have additional questions, please contact the Office of Field Education:

field@msudenver.edu

303-615-1655