



# The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work

## **Student Guide to Graduate Practicum**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**School of Social Work**

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# **Section One: Graduate Program Requirements**

## **Practicum Education**

Practicum education is a multifaceted professional activity that requires students to engage the dimensions of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes to support competency development in a complex configuration of activities across a wide range of settings. The practicum serves as a primary link between knowledge presented in the classroom and actual social work practice. It also provides students with an opportunity to build a repertoire of competencies, to test those competencies in actual practice settings, and to enhance their sense of identification with the profession. Both Foundation and Concentration Practicum instruction are addressed below.

The practicum has historically been one of the key elements in social work education, providing an opportunity for the student to build, integrate, and apply knowledge in work with a client population within an agency setting. Practicum serves as an educational experience for the graduate student as well as a transition to the professional work world. For all these reasons, students often report that Practicum is one of the most important and challenging parts of the curriculum.

The First Practicum internship is based on the generalist perspective to provide a broad and shared foundation experience regardless of students' concentration choice and should integrate an understanding of micro, mezzo and macro level practices.

The Final Practicum internship focuses on developing advanced specialized skills in the students' concentration areas of Clinical or Administration and Policy Practice while maintaining that foundation year's understanding of the intertwined nature of all levels of practice.

## **The Practicum Partnership**

Success of the practicum requires forming and sustaining a partnership between the four key players: the Agency, the Practicum Instructor, the Faculty Liaison, and the Student. This partnership begins during the placement process and is sustained throughout the practicum. Without the commitment and the dedication of each in the system, the practicum will not fulfill its ultimate goal: to assist in the preparation of a social work practitioner who has a strong professional identity and capably engages knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes in building practice competence.

## **The Agency**

In the practicum partnership, the school assumes central responsibility and leadership for the educational focus of the student's learning experience. However, agencies are a critical resource in a practicum program and carry significant responsibility for the education of students. The school's selection of agency settings and Practicum Instructors is a crucial part of ensuring the educational focus of practicum and the overall success of the practicum program.

Fortunately, the Austin area has a sufficient number of human service agencies representing diverse functions, sizes, and structures, and serving a variety of client populations to meet the school's needs for practicum placements. The school is affiliated with a broad spectrum of these

agencies enabling it to be selective in the choice of appropriate settings. Available agencies differ from year to year due to changes in staffing or their ability to work with students. The school utilizes a variety of agencies in areas of service such as mental health, healthcare, schools, and child welfare, and serve a diversity of client populations including older adults, children, adolescents, and families.

Agencies utilized for the first practicum experience are generally located in the Austin area and surrounding communities to accommodate the concurrent practicum plan. This makes liaising manageable for the faculty and keeps commuting for the students to a minimum.

Agencies utilized for the final practicum experience are also generally located within Austin and surrounding areas. However, students may be placed out-of-town, out-of-state or internationally in the advanced final Practicum internship.

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 school
3. The availability of appropriate supervision
4. A primary purpose of the organization, or the identified program or department within an organization, must be to address human needs. This can include the areas of social policy formulation, administration, evaluation, research, direct service delivery, etc.
5. The agency/organization cannot engage in discriminatory practices in either the hiring of personnel, the acceptance of students or clientele, including requiring a student to sign a statement of faith since all internships must be available to all students.
6. The agency/organization is committed to the educational goals of the school as demonstrated by the Practicum Instructor's participation in the school's educational program. These activities might include attendance/presenting at Practicum Instructor workshops, completion of online Practicum Instructor trainings, guest lectures, participation in the school's committees, etc.
7. The agency/organization must support the placement and allow sufficient release time for the Practicum Instructor to provide educational supervision to the student.
8. A reasonable stipend for the services of the student is encouraged when possible. This will vary by organization, is not required, and is based on similar programs for student internships within that organization, as well as on hours of service.
9. An agency must provide a Practicum Instructor with a Master's in Social Work from an accredited university. For supervision of Master's level students, a minimum of two years of postgraduate social work experience is also required.
10. The agency/organization must provide access to necessary administrative resources to sustain and integrate student activities including but not limited to office space, phones, database, administrative support, etc.
11. The agency/organization must provide necessary measures to protect students' safety. This may minimally include training in policies and procedures for conducting home visits; interacting with clients with potentially aggressive behavior; and handling emergencies, as well as appropriate screening of student assignments by Practicum Instructors.
12. The agency/organization must have a system of community accountability. This is demonstrated by a representative board of directors; fiscal accountability via the budget review process; or in the case of private-for-profit direct service organizations, be subject to periodic review by an accrediting agency.

13. The agency must communicate changes in supervision staffing to the Practicum Office as soon as possible in order to make the necessary arrangements for student supervision.
14. The student will be in a practice setting that will expand, enhance and/or introduce new elements into their previous work and educational experiences.
15. The setting will provide a “learning” or “educational” experience for the student, rather than a “work” or “observation” experience.

These criteria represent the basic elements for safeguarding the educational nature of the practicum experience.

In addition, the first MSSW practicum placement for each student is chosen with the following goals:

1. The placement will support the generalist perspective in social work.
2. The agency will be able to provide the student with four basic requirements addressing micro, mezzo, and macro level practices: individual cases, intake/assessment, a group experience, and macro practice experience.

The MSSW final practicum placement for each student is chosen with the following goals:

1. The placement will support the student’s concentration focused learning: either Clinical or Administration and Policy Practice
2. The agency will respect the advanced student status and provide educational challenges sufficient to their standing as a final practicum student.

## **The Practicum Instructor**

The Practicum Instructor remains at the center of practicum education and is the key to the quality of the practicum experience for an individual student. Potential Practicum Instructors are identified in conjunction with the agency but approval rests with the Practicum Office. Criteria for the selection of Practicum Instructors include the following:

1. The primary Practicum Instructor (PI) of record must have a Master’s degree from an accredited school of social work. At least two years of post-graduate experience is necessary for supervision of MSSW students. For international practicum, cultural competence and global realities require a broader understanding of professional social work preparation around the world, but comparable Practicum Instructor ability to support student education is always sustained.
2. The PI 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 Practicum Instructor in the educational role.
3. The PI must agree with the learning goals of professional social work education and be committed to quality education for the student.
4. The PI 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 PI is expected to participate in the ongoing mutual exchange of ideas with the faculty. One arena for this is in the seminars and workshops that are held during the year.

6. The PI is expected to attend orientation sessions, complete online training modules available through the school's website and/or available for individual orientation by the faculty liaison.
7. The PI for out of town or state placements must be on-site and licensed in accordance with the state's requirements.
8. The PI must be willing and able to contribute to the evaluation of the student through written documents including process recordings, learning contracts, and student evaluation instruments.
9. The PI should have been employed at the agency for at least six months prior to supervising interns. This requirement may be reviewed and exceptions approved by the Assistant Dean for Practicum Education under compelling circumstances, especially if the PI is a known partner.

Although an onsite Practicum Instructor provides the preferred method of supervision, due to the movement of social work into non-traditional settings, this is not always feasible. When an approved agency is unable to provide a full time Practicum Instructor to work with the student, the following options are available with final approval resting with the UT Office of Practicum Education:

1. Supervision by a part-time employee with an MSSW and at least two years post-graduate experience
2. Supervision by an equally eligible MSSW in another division of the same agency, with approval of the administrators in each division
3. Supervision by an equally eligible MSSW hired or otherwise engaged by the agency for the specific purpose of providing student supervision. This must be supplemented by a practice supervisor who is onsite and can oversee the day-to-day work of the student. The MSSW and practice supervisor need to work closely together in the matter of assignments, agency policy and other matters that would impact the student's achievement of the course objectives. In rare cases and MSSW who is either on the board of the agency, connected with the agency in some other way, or in practice somewhere else in the community may volunteer the time necessary for supervision. In those cases, the school will need to ascertain the level of commitment on the part of the volunteer, in order to assure the student will receive the time commitment necessary to achieve quality supervision. Like all approved supervisors, external PIs are required to provide a copy of their resume to the OPE and to complete new PI training either in-person or online.

The approved PI's primary role, in relation to the student and the school, is an educator. The PI is viewed as the primary teacher who creates and protects a positive educational climate to facilitate student learning and engages the student in knowledge, value, and skill development relates to social work practice and the service-giving assignments in the agency. Other responsibilities of the PI include:

1. Orienting the student to the setting. This includes all relevant personnel, policies and procedures, meetings, dress code, record keeping and agency documentation, confidentiality and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) regulations, intake, referral, transfer and termination, and special auspices.
2. Establishing a learning contract with each student



3. Providing the necessary experiences to meet the educational goals and allow the student to demonstrate required competencies
4. Teaching the appropriate use of supervision including when and how it is utilized and for 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 clients
7. Evaluating with the student and the Faculty Liaison the student's progress throughout the internship
8. Providing regularly scheduled and uninterrupted supervision for one hour each week to enhance the student's educational learning and practice skills
9. Providing necessary training and monitor student's compliance with safety policies and procedures
10. The PI and intern commit to uphold and advance the National Association of Social Workers 10 Standards and Indicators of Cultural Competence
11. Notifying the faculty liaison as soon as possible should problems regarding the student arise in the practicum setting. The faculty liaison and PI will confer with the ADPE and make decisions regarding the student as needed
12. Participating with the school in continuing mutual effort to upgrade and enhance the practicum program and to attend school workshops for PIs
13. Participating in the school whenever possible by sharing expertise in specific areas
14. Communicating with the practicum office any planned or unexpected changes that would impact current or future supervision of students

PIs and Faculty Liaisons are expected to share information freely in service of the student's education.

## **The Faculty Liaison**

The Faculty Liaison integrates curriculum into practicum and develops the connection between the agencies and the school through regular communication and feedback with all internship related parties including the intern, PI, additional agency-based staff, and the Office of Practicum Education. Students are assigned to a faculty liaison and agency based upon agency placement, student and agency scheduling needs, and the expertise and interests of the students and faculty liaison. In the first placement, graduate students have access to their faculty liaison on a weekly basis in the integrative seminar, during liaison visits, via phone and email, and by scheduling office appointments as needed. In the final practicum placement, students have access to the faculty liaison over the course of the semester during liaison visits, via phone and email, and by scheduling appointments as needed.

A brief list of the responsibilities of the faculty liaison in relation to monitoring of student placements includes the following:

1. Conduct liaison visits as designated times during the semester to confer with the PI and the student about the student's professional development in relation to the educational objectives and competencies.
2. Participate with the PI and student in the assessment of the student's learning needs and help identify goals and educationally substantive assignments.

3. Attempt to identify early possible challenge areas with individual students and act to assist both the student and agency to meet educational needs and resolve conflicts.
4. Aid in the growth and training of PIs in their educational role.
5. Provide feedback and evaluation of student performance using weekly journals, a learning contract, process recordings, and midterm and final evaluation tools.
6. Ongoing problem solving around placement issues with students and PIs, including moving students to difference placements as needed.
7. Gatekeeping through initiation and follow through with students in level review process in adherence with the UT-SSW Standards for Social Work Education.
8. Assign the grade for first practicum or course credit for final practicum students.

Faculty Liaisons and agency-based Practicum Instructors work jointly to foster individualized student learning and to monitor and evaluate student progress in meeting Practicum objectives and demonstrating competencies. Faculty Liaisons schedule and visit with students and Practicum Instructors in the Austin area at least twice a full-length semester, with at least one additional visit in the summer semester for extended Final Practicum placements. Domestic long-distance Final Practicum students – 60 miles or more outside Austin – typically receive one in-person liaison visit over the course of their internship with additional phone and digital contact. The University has a commitment to make additional practicum visits on an as needed basis. Visits are conducted to establish learning contracts, review progress, and evaluate student performance.

Liaison visits are defined as a scheduled meeting with at least the Faculty Liaison, Practicum Instructor and intern for at least 30 minutes and may include additional staff/ supervisors. Liaison visits may be in-person (typically onsite at the agency) or via video- or audio-conference call, with the preferred remote option being video-conference due to the value of additional non-verbal communication.

## **The Student**

The primary responsibility of the student in Practicum is to demonstrate the competencies of practicum as an active adult learner in the practice setting and in the practicum seminar. Because students are providing services to clients who are often vulnerable and are seeking assistance, it is important that students make a commitment to actively pursue the knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes necessary to accomplish this. Students are not expected to already possess this knowledge base and skills, but instead, to take on the responsibility to involve themselves in the learning process. This includes remaining open to and acting on feedback from the Practicum 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 Practicum Instructor.

## **Supervision**

Students are supervised in the practicum by a person with an MSSW degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program and at least two-years, post-graduate experience. This person is vetted and approved by the school as the practicum instructor after submitting credentials to the OPE, and is required to complete the new practicum instructor training either in person at the bi-annual Practicum Instructor Development Institute or online through the OFE's database.

Every student in Practicum requires a minimum of one hour of supervision per 16 hours in Practicum. One hour of this must be individual educational supervision with the designated

practicum instructor. The additional hour may include individual supervision, group supervision (with other students and/or staff), or specialized supervision by an expert in the agency or a consultant, e.g., a skilled fellow staff member, administrator, or professional from another discipline.

Students should not be left alone in the agency without professional staff. Leaving students alone on the premises or otherwise in charge to open and close the building, during staff retreats, client meetings, etc. is not an appropriate use of students. Students, no matter how competent or skilled, are not in position or permitted to take on those types of staff responsibilities.

Supervision is expected to be both administrative and educational in nature. Administrative supervision includes topics such as a description of policies of the agency, assignment of work and coordination of staff efforts. Educationally focused supervision includes an emphasis on theory and helping the student connect agency assignments to the educational objectives of the placement and required competencies. In supervision, students engage with knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective process in mastering the required competencies. The Practicum Instructor teaches knowledge and skills, for example, through discussion of applying theoretical frameworks applicable to the client population and setting. Supervision sparks use of critical thinking skills and exercise of judgment, through discussion of ethical dilemmas and assessment data. The student's affective processes come into play in supervision as well, through increased self-awareness and self-regulation modeled and encouraged by the supervisor. Both types of supervision are important and should be a part of the practicum experience.

Students are expected to play an active role in supervision. This includes being prepared and on time for the supervisory session. Although the Practicum Instructor will have topics selected for discussion, the expectation is that students will also have any topics identified that need to be covered. One of the most important areas for growth during Practicum is the student's understanding of the need for a commitment to life-long learning and self-evaluation as a beginning practitioner.

Learning how to prepare for and use supervision may be a new experience for students. Planning is very important in making productive use of supervision. Students are encouraged to keep lists throughout the week of issues to be discussed. Another tool for supervisory sessions is the learning contract. The goals stated in the contract may be used as a guide for the supervisory session.

Other ways to use supervision productively include:

1. Using supervision to identify strengths as well as gaps related to the competencies
2. Discussing process recordings
3. Reflecting on the dimensions of knowledge, values, skills, cognitive, and affective processes
4. Requesting feedback on performance and skills
5. Seeking additional readings and resources to improve practice effectiveness
6. Using supervision as a vehicle for examining the impact of the practicum experience on the development of professional use of self
7. Acting on feedback from supervisor

## Teaching Methods

Each Practicum Instructor is unique in their approach to Practicum education. However, the following methods have proven useful over a variety of settings and Practicum Instructor teaching styles. Some are required by the school. Others are simply suggestions. It is expected that an appropriate mix of suggested methods will be utilized, depending on availability in the agency setting and the educational needs of the students.

1. Process recordings (required)
2. Review and discussion of case documentation (required)
3. Direct observation of student's work
4. Student observation of PI at work
5. Audio recordings
6. Video recordings
7. Role plays
8. Discussion of events and experiences
9. Practicum trips
10. Interdisciplinary simulations
11. Visits to other service providers for comparison/contrast
12. Group discussion with other students/professional staff
13. Pertinent videos
14. Additional readings in appropriate areas
15. Attendance at relevant trainings and/or conferences
16. Student presentations
17. Online training and webinars

## Service Provision and Educational Assignments

The service provision and educational assignments of practicum provide the experiential base on which a student realistically moves toward completion of the objectives of the Practicum sequence, demonstrating the core competencies, and becoming a professional social worker. Assignments are identified by the Practicum Instructor with consultation from the Faculty Liaison and are based on the educational objectives and core competencies. Students are given a minimum set of assignments, regardless of agency setting, but these are individualized for every student. The learning contract links specific assignments to the learning goals of the practicum. The underlying principle in the delineation of service-giving assignments is that these provide meaningful learning experiences. Assignments are geared toward engaging the student's knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes in demonstration of the competencies of the Practicum experience, to support a generalist approach to practice within the social work domain. Furthermore, assignments are chosen for their usefulness in assisting the student to transfer competencies from the practicum to other settings in the future.

Service-giving assignments also encompass opportunities to perform a variety of social work roles in practice with individuals, families, groups, and communities including outreach, enabler, broker, advocate, teacher, planner, researcher, evaluator, etc. Both direct and indirect assignments are required during the practicum.

Student assignments include opportunities to work with individuals and families with a wide variety of needs and concerns. Experience involving the entire problem-solving process from engagement to evaluation is required. Over the course of the placement, students have opportunities to perform intake duties, to complete assessments, to work with collateral contacts, and to carry ongoing cases. Students carry some cases from intake through termination while others are referred to them from within the agency. The Practicum Instructor is responsible for screening and assigning cases for the student. In addition, cases are selected in order to give the student an understanding of the richness of human diversity and thus represent differences in age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic levels. All students must have an opportunity to work with disadvantaged populations, providing opportunities to impact social, economic, and environmental justice concerns. Emphasis on assessment and linkage with appropriate referrals in the community is another aspect of the students' work. Case documentation of work with individuals and families is also required. Students must submit process recordings, assessments, ongoing case recordings, and other forms of recording for review by the Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison.

Students are also given assignments to work at the group level during their placement. All students are expected to co-plan and co-facilitate a group during their generalist internship experience. This entails responsibility for planning for the group, curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation of the group experience. The Practicum Instructor is responsible for assisting the student in the identification of an appropriate learning experience in this area. Generally, opportunities for group work center around psychoeducationally-focused groups such as parenting skills training, independent living skills training, development of problem-solving skills, etc. It is important that students receive appropriate training and preparation so that assigned groupwork is commensurate with their skills.

Students are also expected to carry out a macro-level administrative/planning/research assignment under supervision, as part of their generalist practicum experience. Responsibilities in this area include: the identification of a need within the agency or community; consideration of policy implications of the project; consideration of alternative approaches to addressing the need; delineation of a plan to address the concern including methods to be used and needed resources; implementation of the plan; coordination of the action systems involved; and evaluation of the process and outcomes. Projects that are identified must be within the normal duties of the professional staff within the agency and must have agency sanction. A part of this assignment may also entail an oral presentation of the project to the staff and/or Board of Directors of the agency.

Students must also be given opportunities to engage in a number of other indirect service activities in the placement. Students are expected to attend staff meetings, case reviews, or other staff development opportunities within the agency. Attendance at staff meetings is a critical part of students' abilities to integrate themselves into the agency setting. In addition, students may attend meetings of the agency's Board of Directors or another policy-making group during the year. This experience is processed within supervision with the Practicum Instructor and is discussed in the integrative seminar. Students are also encouraged to visit other agencies and attend other community meetings including inter-organizational meetings, NASW chapter meetings, and meetings of other city, county, state, and federal policy-making bodies. In particular, students are encouraged to observe and participate in the legislative process during state legislative sessions and to attend Social Work Advocacy Day and/or Social Work Students' Day at the legislature as offered.

Emphasis is placed on the student's carrying a manageable and sequenced load in the Practicum. This is supported in the agencies by the Practicum Instructors. Although care is taken to structure and

sequence the student's learning as much as possible, the reality of the agency-based Practicum model implies that, at times, students will feel unprepared to take on some service giving assignments. Reflections on this in supervision with the Practicum Instructor and with the Faculty Liaison in the Practicum log and during integrative seminar are helpful ways of processing these experiences.

## **Educational Tools**

A variety of educational tools are available to interns, Practicum Instructors, and Faculty Liaisons to support student learning and accountability. Among the most essential formal tools are the learning contract, journals, time sheets, process recordings, midterm and final evaluations, and self-reflective narratives.

Students develop learning contracts in consultation with their Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison. The learning contracts identify educational goals, learning opportunities, and responsibilities appropriate to the needs of the clients and constituencies of the internship setting that allow the students to develop and demonstrate the competencies. Learning contracts are developed at the beginning of each semester and are amendable documents based on the evolving needs of the student and the agency.

In Generalist Practicum, students submit weekly journals detailing their understanding of the integration of practice and theory, ethical issues, and their growing identity as professionals. The faculty liaison reviews and responds to the student's experience, using this tool to reinforce the values, knowledge, skills, and affective and cognitive processes. In Advanced Practicum, the specialized concentration specific practicum, the OPE requires journals for international practicum interns only but Practicum Instructors may employ journals as an educational tool if appropriate to the placement.

Students are expected to use timesheets to document their time in Practicum and to have those signed by their Practicum Instructor. Students are encouraged to use the agency timesheets and are not required to use the timesheets provided at the agency exclusively.

Process recordings at their most basic consist of a transcribed section of an interaction in which the intern is involved, the intern's authentic recounting and reflection upon their knowledge, values, skills, cognitive and affective processes related to that interaction, and the Practicum Instructor's written feedback. Process recordings should be submitted to the Faculty Liaison in accordance with the guidelines below but are to be spread out over the internship to allow comparison between different points in time and potentially student development. More information is provided to the student by the Faculty Liaison.

Midterm and final evaluations provide a teaching tool and formal structure for assessing student progress on the competencies and outcomes. The student and Practicum Instructor collaborate to rate, document, and evaluate the intern's progress toward the CSWE Educational Policies and Academic Standards' educational competencies using outcomes and help determine priorities for the remainder

of the semester. Midterm evaluations are to be entered online by the Practicum Instructor and intern midway through the internship and available for review with the Faculty Liaison.

Midterm evaluations serve as a first draft of the final evaluation. The Practicum Instructor is responsible for the finalized evaluation though both the student and the Practicum Instructor contribute content. The final evaluation is a permanent part of the student's educational record and may be requested for release to state licensing boards, Doctor of Philosophy programs, and/ or governmental security clearance applications. Final evaluations are due to the OPE when the student completes their internship.

The self-reflection narrative is due at the end of each semester of Practicum and is a guided reflection of the student's experience over the course of the internship. It allows the student to demonstrate the ability to integrate the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the classroom with experiences in Practicum. In addition, the narrative helps the student demonstrate critical analytical skills to identify issues, place them in context, and evaluate results. The intern is solely responsible for creating the narrative and submits it to both the Practicum Instructor and the Faculty Liaison.

All practicum education forms are available online at <https://socialwork.utexas.edu/academics/practicum/forms/>.

# Section Two: First Practicum

## Organization of the First Practicum Experience

The first practicum placement occurs in the first year for full time students and in the second year for part-time or full-time extended students. Practicum is on a concurrent plan, which provides practicum instruction activities approximately 16 hours per week, 200 hours each in the fall and spring semesters, for a total of 400 hours. In addition, students take a three-hour practice class and spend an hour weekly in a Practicum seminar held at the school. The concurrent practicum plan best addresses the needs of beginning graduate students:

1. It provides the maximum potential for coordination between class and practicum instruction, emphasizing the relationship between knowledge and practice.
2. It provides an earlier opportunity for students to relate theory to professional social work practice and its issues.
3. It is a format within which students have an opportunity to develop interactional and analytic skills by having a practicum placement of longer duration, covering two semesters.

The first practicum consists of two courses, SW 384R and SW 384S. Each of these courses provides three credit hours, for a total of six credit hours. Students typically remain in the same agency for the two semesters.

In the Practicum placement, student assignments revolve around service-giving responsibilities and opportunities to develop and demonstrate competencies. Assignments are structured to allow students to apply theory as they develop practice skills. All students receive supervision from the designated agency-based supervisor, the Practicum Instructor, who holds an MSSW degree from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program, and has at least two-years, postgraduate experience. The Faculty Liaison is the designated faculty person responsible for monitoring and evaluating the students' performance in Practicum. The student works with the same liaison for both semesters of the First Practicum experience.

A generalist approach is the underlying foundation of the first Practicum sequence. This approach is seen as encompassing the eco-systems, developmental, and transtheoretical framework where students learn the importance of the interaction between the person and the environment in order to understand and better enhance the developmental and problem-solving capacities of clients, especially vulnerable populations. Students learn to identify and prioritize a wide range of needs of their client systems and to link clients with appropriate resources when needed. Within the generalist approach the student is also encouraged to consider the broader implications of client problems, to work to contribute to the improvement of human service systems and policies, and to identify needed resources for clients in order for them to reach their potential.

The problem-solving approach to intervention at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community levels is also emphasized. Students learn to apply the problem-solving approach including the principles of data collection, problem identification, assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation to systems of various sizes. Students also learn the importance of research in the acquisition



of practice knowledge, evaluation of systems, and evaluation of their own practice. Additionally, students learn evidence-based practice at the micro, mezzo and macro levels. The practicum occurs within the organizational context of an approved human service agency or program and includes both direct and indirect service assignments that are supervised by the Practicum Instructor in consultation with the Faculty Liaison.

The Faculty Liaison teaches the one-hour/week practicum seminar as well. Students use the seminar to discuss and explore their attempts in Practicum to make use of the learning they have acquired throughout the curriculum and in practice. The overall goals of the seminar are to assist the student with the practicum experience and strengthen the relationship between the classroom content and practicum. Another contribution of the seminar is to help socialize the student into the profession by discussion of common social work issues and sharing insights and experiences. The seminar assists students in problem solving around practicum issues by helping to identify and clarify broad practice issues such as client progress and worker responsibility, the connection between micro and macro practice, client self-determination, and worker's influence, etc.

The course objectives for Practicum I and II align with the CSWE competencies and students must:

1. Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior.
2. Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.
3. Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice.
4. Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice.
5. Engage in policy practice.
6. Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.
7. Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.
8. Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.
9. Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities.

The competencies and related behaviors are expanded upon and operationalized in the practicum evaluation forms. Students are assigned to the practicum classes by the ADPE. Students are grouped in seminars depending on their agency assignment and student scheduling considerations. Usually, a variety of agencies and client populations are represented in each seminar, potentially with an emphasis on a cluster of agencies dealing with a particular practice area or population such as child welfare, women's services, health, mental health, etc. This model allows students to become familiar with a variety of agencies and client populations, while also being exposed to more in-depth content in one specific area. Students benefit from this exposure to various agencies and populations and learn from each other.

Having the same instructor teach practice, seminar, and liaise to the placement facilitates the linkage between the classroom and Practicum and allows the Faculty Liaison to have extensive contact with the student and build knowledgeable working relationship.

## The First Practicum Placement Process

The first practicum placement is determined in the following manner:

1. The application materials of incoming students are reviewed by the admissions team.
2. After acceptance into the program, students receive a practicum questionnaire requesting specific information regarding past work experiences, volunteer activities, limitations or specific challenges regarding participation in practicum (transportation, personal factors, etc.) and areas of interest. A practicum file is established incorporating this data plus pertinent material from the admissions process. Clinical faculty members review admission materials and the practicum questionnaire in preparation for the placement process.
3. Approved agencies are surveyed for the upcoming semester and submit requests for interns with internship descriptions including specific related to responsibilities, location, and stipends.
4. Students are divided into class cohorts and a faculty liaison is assigned the students' files. During the match process, the ADPE and faculty liaisons are responsible for reviewing the students' materials and advocating for the best internship match and divers cohort makeup allowable given the constraints of placements available and student body makeup.
5. A match is made with the agencies that best seems to meet individual student's learning needs based on prior experiences, interests, and selected concentration.
6. The faculty liaison assigns the student to an agency and practicum instructor. The faculty liaison and seminar leader are typically the same person.
7. The placement is finalized with the agency confirming the student's name, weekly schedule, dates of placement, and faculty liaison.
8. Once the agency has confirmed the internship, the OPE notifies the students of their placement, typically two-four weeks prior to the start of practicum.
9. The clinical faculty liaisons assigned to the interns conduct a two-day Practicum Engagement Seminar after MSSW orientations and prior to classes.
10. Practicum typically begins the first day of classes. Students and practicum instructors must sign and submit the Practicum Placement Expectations form.

### Other considerations regarding placements

Conflict of Interest. No social work student may be placed at an agency wherein that student was or is, a client or an immediate family member was, or is, a client or employee. Students who are found attempting to secure or who secure a placement in an agency where they, or a member of their family, are or were a client may have their entry into field practicum delayed. Additionally, the field supervisor must not be a family member, friend, spouse, partner, ex-spouse/partner, etc. Since the MSSW Field Education Department does not ascertain client or employee information from agencies or students, it is the responsibility of the student to decline (or not select) a placement base on conflict of interest.

### Required Responsibilities

The following are minimal expectations for the generalist placement:

1. Each student, with the assistance of the practicum instructor, will create a learning contract that will be reviewed by the faculty liaison during the first liaison visit.
2. Each student will carry approximately three to six individual ongoing clients each semester as the setting allows. This is intended as a guideline and may vary based on agency and

internship structure, e.g., where primary responsibilities center around intake and assessment or crisis intervention. Placements are expected to provide in-person client opportunities and to consult with the faculty liaison and support the student in activities beyond the agency if client services are primarily provided remotely.

3. The agency should provide opportunities for intake/assessment.
4. Each student must have a group experience. Although it is not always possible to implement this in the first semester, the student should begin the planning phase during that time. The student will take part in planning, implementing, and cofacilitating a group during their placement. Students should bring and/or receive adequate support from the practicum instructor and training to facilitate or cofacilitate at least one multi-session group. Practicum instructors should consult with the faculty liaison and support the student in activities beyond the agency if group opportunities are limited within.
5. Each student must have Administration and Policy Practice (APP) macro responsibilities during the course of the year. This should be something that benefits the agency and is accomplished with the cooperation of the staff. A macro practice assignment should have several phases, such as:
  - a. Identification of a need within the agency or community
  - b. Consideration of policy implications of the project
  - c. Consideration of alternative approaches
  - d. Delineation of a plan, including methods, and resources
  - e. Implementation of the plan
  - f. Coordination of the systems involved
  - g. Evaluation of the process and outcomes

## **Liaison Activities**

A liaison visit is a scheduled meeting with at least the Faculty Liaison, Practicum Instructor and intern for at least 30 minutes and may include additional staff/supervisors.

A liaison visit can happen in three different ways:

1. Site visit-in-person, face-to-face, any agreed upon location
2. Remote video conference visit
3. Remote audio conference visit

The default option for a conference visit is video due to the value of additional non-verbal communication included. Audio is a secondary option.

## **Liaison visits**

Fall semester (200 hours/semester): Two site visits, one visit per each half of the semester— one onsite and one remote. The final liaison visit will typically be via remote video/audio conference. Practicum Instructor may request a site visit. Faculty Liaisons may also choose to conduct a third site visit especially if it is a new placement, new Practicum instructor, or if there are other compelling reasons.

First year Spring semester (200 hours/semester): Two site visits, one each per half of the semester— both remote unless there are reasons for an onsite visit.

## **Practicum Assignments Timeline**

Weeks 1-5: Learning contract collected

Weeks 6-10: Mid-term evaluation completed and reviewed

Weeks 11-15: Final evaluation for semester completed, reviewed, and submitted

The intern provides the self-reflective narrative to the Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison.

The intern and Practicum Instructor complete the final evaluation and after review, the Faculty Liaison submits the finalized version to the OPE no later than the last day of the grading period that semester.

The student's internship is terminated when the Faculty Liaison submits the completed final evaluation.

## **Process recordings**

1. The intern must be an active party in the PR.
2. The intern submits the PR to the practicum instructor for comments in time to get that to the faculty liaison with comments for review. The faculty liaison returns the PR with their additional comments to the student and practicum instructor.
3. Total of four over the fall and spring semesters, two each semester.
4. Practicum instructor/faculty liaison may choose to substitute a video role play in lieu of a PR.
5. May require additional PRs as needed.

## **Self-reflection narratives**

This assignment is collected at the end of the semester along with the evaluations and are designed to be shared between the intern, Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison. Narratives should be turned into the OPE with final evaluations.

## **Timesheets**

Timesheets should be submitted to canvas at the end of each month. If the intern fails to submit a signed final evaluation, self-reflection narrative, or timesheets before grades are due, the student may earn an incomplete or a grade earned depending on the circumstances around the delay. More information about each of these educational tools is available in Section 1: Graduate Practicum Requirements.

## **Section Three: Final Practicum**

### **The Organization of the Final Practicum Experience**

The final practicum consists of two courses, SW 694R and SW 394S. The Practicum sequence is based on a block Practicum plan which requires that students be in Practicum approximately 36-40 hours a week, for a total of 500 clock hours in one semester or over the course of two semesters. These courses provide six and three credit hours respectively, for a total of nine credit hours. Students remain in the same agency for the duration of the practicum. Students may also elect to take an extended block plan that requires approximately 22-26 hours per week for two semesters. The final practicum experience is more individualized based on the student's chosen concentration, needs, experience, and interests.

Students study within one of two advanced, specialized concentrations – either Clinical or Administration and Policy Practice. The Final Practicum experience is concentration specific and the majority of the work in the internship should be specific to the assigned specialization, either Clinical or APP. Internships that offer a significant minority of cross-specialization opportunities should advertise that and clarify responsibilities in the interview process.

It is the student's responsibility to register for the required course(s) for Practicum including the concurrent SW385T Capstone course, which is only offered in the spring. The Capstone course builds upon all previous courses including Practicum internships and is not a Practicum-centric seminar. Students, especially post-BSW students, may take additional coursework during the summer of an extended internship.

### **The Final Practicum Placement Process**

Final Practicum is offered in both one semester, full block, and two semesters, extended block, both for a total of 500 hours. There are benefits to each from which the student is allowed to choose. All students, including post-BSWs, will have completed their preparation for final Practicum by finishing their course prerequisites. Accordingly, all students have the opportunity to be well prepared for the fully immersive experience of full-time practicum in one semester. This 35-40-hour per week experience also approximates the full-time professional positions they will be trained to undertake upon graduation and is therefore a valuable ramp up to employment in the community as a social worker. Agencies also structure their internship offerings to match the consistency of hosting a full-time intern and this adds to the range of learning opportunities available, e.g., crisis intervention where daily attendance is beneficial to clients and learning alike.

As higher education costs have increased, students are more often seeking paid employment during their schooling to support their education and other expenses. Offering extended practicum at approximately 20-25 hours per week over two semesters allows these students and others with extracurricular responsibilities, e.g., family responsibilities, greater access to the MSSW program which draws a more diverse student body and therefore a more enriched academic learning environment. As happens for full block placements, agencies structure their internships to match the extended nature of the two-semester students which allows, for example, more longer-term counseling opportunities. Having both a concentrated learning experience and an extended option also addresses the different

learning needs of students who may thrive at different paces well as the varied service needs of community partners over the course of a year.

The final practicum placement, which will be in the student's specialization area, is arranged for each student with the following goals:

1. The student is an emerging professional. This is the transition internship between classroom/education and practicum practice/professional identification.
2. The student would take an active part in determining their educational and professional goals and this should be reflected in the selection of a practicum setting.
3. The student should accept professional responsibility for the interview process in affiliating with an agency/organization.
4. The school accepts a more advisory/broker role in this placement.
5. The school helps both the student and the agency clarify what is expected from this final placement.
6. Placement is an interactive process between student, school, and agency, with agency and student taking more active roles than for the first placement.

## **Regular Placement Process for Final Practicum**

The following procedures are used in final placement:

1. Students attend mandatory informational meetings about the placement process.
2. A list of available internships, from approved agencies, with brief descriptions of each program and their practicum placement offering is made available to students.
3. Students attend the zoom internship fair to help measure best agency "fit".
4. Students prepare a cover letter including their educational priorities for their internship.
5. Students prepare a professional quality resume and other work readiness skills with the recommended aid of the DiNitto Center for Career Services.
6. In individualized and small-group advising sessions, students and clinical faculty liaisons discuss resumes, educational goals, and prioritize agency/organizations for the interview process.
7. Students rank prioritized agency setting preferences.
8. The Office of Practicum Education (OPE) collects, organizes, and delivers student resumes and cover letters to the agencies.
9. The OPE sends resumes and cover letters to the agencies.
10. The OPE sends information to the students to set up an interview with the agencies.
11. Students take the initiative to contact, interview, and follow up with potential agency placements in a professional manner.
12. If additional interviews are necessary, the students work with the OPE to facilitate these as needed.
13. After an agency has offers a placement and the student has accepted, the student is responsible for entering the placement in the OPE database.
14. The students are oriented to practicum by the OPE.
15. Students are assigned and agencies notified of their faculty liaisons for confirmed placements.

The students are given detailed information and access to agency requests for interns during the mandatory informational meeting in early fall which outlines the above procedures, giving deadline dates for each activity.

### **Other considerations regarding placements**

Conflict of Interest. No social work student may be placed at an agency wherein that student was or is, a client or an immediate family member was, or is, a client or employee. Students who are found attempting to secure or who secure a placement in an agency where they, or a member of their family, are or were a client may have their entry into field practicum delayed. Additionally, the field supervisor must not be a family member, friend, spouse, partner, ex-spouse/partner, etc. Since the MSSW Field Education Department does not ascertain client or employee information from agencies or students, it is the responsibility of the student to decline (or not select) a placement base on conflict of interest.

### **Atypical Placement Processes for Final Practicum**

The majority of students will be placed using the regular placement procedures. A significant minority, however, will find placements using the atypical placement process, which includes early placement opportunities, work-based, dual degree, domestic long distance, and international placements.

### **Early Selection Opportunities**

The school partners with several agencies that initiate an early placement process due to a variety of agency-based reasons including but not limited to out-of-town status, competitive placement settings and/or the needs of the population, i.e., long-term counseling at University. Students will have the opportunity to attend informational meetings about these specific placements, their timetables, opportunities and expectations in early spring of the year prior to what would otherwise be their regular spring placement. Typically, the early selection process begins in the February eleven months prior to the January internship start. Agencies must demonstrate compelling benefit to the students as determined by the Assistant Dean for Practicum Education (ADPE) in order to be eligible for the early placement process including significant stipends. Students in this process finalize their placements in the spring prior to their final Practicum internships are relieved of their responsibilities and rights in all other placement processes by accepting these internships. If circumstances change, the student is expected to coordinate with the ADPE to determine next steps for finding a suitable internship and will typically be expected to join the regular placement process in Phase II.

### **Work-based Placements**

#### **Policy**

With increasing educational costs, the need to utilize the work setting as a practicum placement may be an option to be considered on an individual basis.

CSWE's standards address the need to maintain the educational focus of the practicum experience and to ensure the uniformity of administration and utilization of practicum placements throughout the Bachelor's and Master's programs. In addition, the Council's standards stress that such agencies commit the necessary resources to facilitate the student's progress in the educational program even though the student may also be an employee. CSWE standards also require that addressing educational competencies for practicum be the foundation of decisions around a student's practicum experience.

Work-based placements (WBP) may overlap with existing employment responsibilities but at least 120 hours of the total internship hours must provide new and different learning experiences beyond existing employment responsibilities. As examples, for a student required to complete 200 hours/semester in Practicum, 60 must be within the employment agency but separate and apart from prior existing employment responsibilities. For 500 hours in Practicum, 120 hours must provide new and different experiences. The purpose of the overlap is to a) acknowledge and deepen the learning available in existing employment responsibilities while b) simultaneously opening new opportunities to broaden the scope of the job position. Responsibilities in a work-based internship are tied explicitly to the competencies in the proposal and on the student's learning contract.

Examples of new and different responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Attendance at task group meetings, e.g., board meetings, community networks, etc.
- Group planning and facilitation.
- Grant writing assistance
- Specialized trainings and instruction
- Responsibilities in a different agency program

In addition, students are required to have a new and different educational supervisor as their dedicated Practicum instructor. Special attention is given to protecting the learner's role and navigating and minimizing the potential conflicts of interest associated with dual relationships. Students are allowed one work-based placement over the course of their enrollment at the UT-SSW to allow a broader base of educational experience.

## **Process**

1. All WBP interns must be in good academic standing with the school. This process is time consuming for the student, for the agency considering such a proposal, and for the OPE. Every effort should be made to initiate work on the proposal as early as possible.
2. The student must meet with agency-based proposed educational and employment supervisors to review and discuss work-based placement possibilities using the proposal form and Practicum Expectations Checklist available online.
3. Steps (a) and (b) should be completed at the same time and the ADPE will not review incomplete submissions. The student should complete these steps as soon as possible in the semester.
  - a. Update the practicum database student profile to indicate student status as Work-Based Process.
  - b. Upload a current resume, signed Practicum Expectations Checklist, and unsigned Work Based Proposal draft in the practicum database.
4. After the ADPE reviews uploaded submissions the second week of each month, the ADPE will email potential advising dates/times to applicants who will meet for individual or small group advising.
5. Students should come to advising prepared with questions. The ADPE will provide feedback to the student on the WBP draft which the student will use in consultation with their proposed educational and employment supervisors to update the proposal. Students may submit no more than three drafts for review.
6. ADPE agency approval:
  - a. The ADPE will email practicum database instructions to the agencies accordingly and talk with supervisors as needed.



- b. Already approved agencies will need to submit an internship request through the database.
  - c. New agency partners will need to register in the database and meet online with the ADPE and/or members of the Community Partnership Development Committee for standard intern agency approval.
  - d. Standard practicum placement requirements apply to all proposed internship sites. More information is available online in the Guides to Practicum.
7. The ADPE will email final confirmation of the internship after:
    - a. Preliminary requirements are met: the student in good academic standing has updated their status in the database and uploaded a current resume and the signed Practicum Expectations Checklist.
    - b. The approved version of the WBP is signed and uploaded in the database.
    - c. The agency information is fully entered into the database.
  8. Students will be expected to follow the steps in the placement process, including attendance at informational and orientation meetings, until proposals are complete and approved.

All students finalized for an atypical placement are relieved of their rights and responsibilities in the regular placement process. Unless there are compelling circumstances beyond their control, students who decide to forego their previously agreed upon atypical placements are not allowed to enter the regular placement process until after the 48-hour offering period at the beginning of Phase II.

## **Student Initiated Placements**

### **Dual Degree and Domestic Long-Distance Practicum**

The MSSW Program offers six dual degree programs, where students can earn an MSSW and a Masters of Business Administration, Divinity, Public Affairs, Public Health, Arts in Latin American Studies, or a Doctor of Jurisprudence. Dual degree (DD) students are the only final Practicum students allowed to initiate their own central Texas internships because they may have needs unique to their programs of study. The majority of dual degree students choose to enter into the regular fall placement process and are guaranteed multiple options that fulfill the requirements of both their degree plans. Their internship development process parallels the domestic long distance (DLD) placement process.

Students come to The University of Texas at Austin from all over the country and our graduates are employed around the globe. The School of Social Work recognizes the importance of providing flexibility for students seeking internships in the areas of expertise or geography important to their careers. For that reason, the school works with students to support them in seeking and developing domestic long-distance placements. The international placement process is completely separate and distinct from the DLD placement process and is addressed immediately following this subsection. The placement process for Hawai'i, Alaska, and U.S. territories' is more closely modeled after the international process and is subject to additional fees. Students interested in placements in these non-contiguous states and U.S. territories need to notify the ADPE approximately one year prior the desired placement semester.

The school does offer some out of town placements through the early selection process and in the regular placement packets that lists agencies available, but those are subsumed within the regular placement process and separate from the DLD process. The term DLD placement is inclusive of all

student-initiated placements beyond 60 miles from the UT-SSW and indicates that students in those sites are eligible for the online corequisite Capstone class.

For placements in the central Texas area, students are required to work through the OPE and to allow the OPE to explore new options. For DD/DLD placements, it is just the opposite. Students are required to take the initiative to set up their own placements in coordination with the OPE. In fact, student's ability to do so is in itself a screening tool for student appropriateness for a student-initiated placement.

Students considering initiating a placement through the Dual Degree or Domestic Long Distance Practicum placement process are required to:

1. Attend the DD/DLD orientation the spring semester in the year prior to the desired spring placement.
2. Submit the required three letters of recommendation and receive approval to move forward in the process from the ADPE.
3. Select potential placement agencies and determine their openness to hosting a UTSHSSW intern. To be a viable placement site, agencies must provide educational opportunities specific to the student's specialization in the program and otherwise meet all the placement requirements. MSSW candidates are required to complete a specialization specific placement (Clinical or APP) under the supervision of an on-site MSSW with at least two-years, post-graduate experience and students are to receive two hours of supervision a week, one in individual weekly sessions with their practicum instructor. Students are required to meet the educational objectives and demonstrate the competencies outlined in their practicum syllabi in SW694R/394S. These syllabi are available on the school website, and it is the student's responsibility to provide these to the agencies.
4. Once the potential agency contacts have been solidified, students are required to email their contact information to the ADPE who will follow up with the requisite paperwork to determine the agency and the placements' ability to support the student in meeting their educational objectives and demonstrating competencies. Affiliation agreements with medical institutions can take up to five months to finalize and students are therefore encouraged to initiate contact as soon after the orientation to atypical practicum as possible.
5. Understand that placement choices will be limited based on available approved agencies locally. Placements in some areas may not be feasible due to limited resources and availability of approved agencies.
6. Understand that if the DD/DLD placement option fails to solidify, the student is subject to the regular placement process and may have to deal with the consequences of a late start and subsequent reduced number of Austin area options due to the DD/DLD pursuit.
7. If a DLD placement falls through, the student on location bears the primary responsibility for securing a new placement in coordination with the faculty liaison and ADPE.
8. Understand that all student-initiated placements are held to the same standards and approval processes as those initiated by the OPE and the decision for final approval rests solely with the ADPE.

Students must have initiated all DD/DLD placement options in time for the OPE to have contact information for one proposed agency by a publicized mid-summer date. This is to allow DD/DLD placements to be finalized prior to the start of the regular placement process.

The OPE may consult with students and agency contacts and will communicate decisions via email with both the student and the agency. The ADPE will assign a Faculty Liaison prior to the start of the spring semester. The Faculty Liaison will be a resource, support and source of accountability via phone and email and will typically visit the student once during the course of their internship.

## Eligibility

At the master's level, only final Practicum students are eligible for DLD placements. Students must be in good standing with the school as evidenced by three positive letters of recommendation and no active academic probation in order to be approved for DLD placements. Students cannot be in the midst of an unresolved official level review process unless they have the explicit permission of their review members. Students are required to submit three letters of recommendation from UT-SSW faculty members and/or BSW Practicum Instructor and Liaison if the student is a post-BSW from a different university or college. Reference forms can be found in section eight of this guide. The additional standard of proof is because the student will be further beyond many of the school's resources in case the need for additional support arises.

Recommendations for finding potential domestic long-distance placement agencies. The following is recommended procedure to assist students in finding a suitable DLD agency placement.

First, students should select a target area that matches their interest. This may be an area of practice, i.e., wilderness camps, or a geographic area, i.e., a student's home state. After researching the agency in general, initial student contact is often via email with a phone follow up. Based on that communication, a student may follow up with a hard copy cover letter and resume (supplementing one that may have been sent electronically) and/or interview plans.

Students should narrow down agency options to a reasonable number. Students should not interview at a large number of agencies since this takes agency resources and can erroneously lead agencies to expect the interns' services when the student may still be in the exploratory phase of the search. Interviews should be reserved for serious inquiries only. Many students set up interviews or meetings over the summer prior to their spring internship.

## International Placements

Human needs do not recognize national boundaries and social work has a long and growing history of global response. Further, the school recognizes and values the oftentimes uniquely transformative nature of international placements and the educational advancements those provide social work students.

Only MSSW final Practicum students are eligible for international placements. Students must be in good standing with the school in order to be approved for international internships and beyond that must be deemed by the International Committee to be a good ambassador on behalf of the School, the United States, and the Social Work profession. International internships are a privilege, not a right, for students. The school retains the right at all stages of the placement process to deny a student access to, or continuation of, an international placement.

## Prerequisites

1. All core courses must be completed by Spring semester excluding the Capstone course, Practicum Education III and IV.
2. Weekly attendance in the fall to the International Practicum Seminar in preparation for International Practicum Placement.
3. Completed recommendation by faculty liaison, practicum instructor and UTSSW faculty other than the liaison.
4. A survey of UT-SSW faculty and staff.
5. A positive recommendation by the International Committee.
6. Fulfilling all requirements of the International Office including restricted region and health clearances.
7. Payment of a \$1500 non-refundable fee, which is required to cover associated costs to the school for international placement.

International placements must meet the same educational standards as all Practicum placements and are vetted by UT faculty and/or associates based on the additional following criteria:

1. **Educational soundness:** The student is able to meet the objectives for the practicum class qualitatively and quantitatively.
2. **Benefit to the school and the agency:** The student's placement and the relationship with the university seeks to provide a real benefit to the agency comparable in value to the student's educational gain. The placement aligns with research, practicum and/or other scholarly endeavors already engaged in or under development by the school, and the agency's relationship with the school and the student has the potential to be of lasting benefit to the clients and benefit of the agency. The most desired working relationships are those that can provide sustained mutual benefit and uniquely compelling learning opportunities not necessarily found in the U.S.
3. **Feasibility:** The student will be able to communicate at a proficient level with agency staff, clients, and university faculty. This requires sufficient language skills for the population and reliable internet access for the student's long-distance learning courses. Feasibility also includes responsible allocation of the school's fiscal resources, i.e., placing multiple students at one site or clustering locations/travel.
4. **Safety:** Recognizing that 100% safety is never a guarantee, the school, through the International Committee and in collaboration with UT's Texas Global seeks to identify risks and ameliorating factors by assessing the site(s)/city/region/country's: security, crime, infrastructure, medical issues/resources and transportation issues. Some international locations may therefore be considered too risky for placement of students.

The school offers a variable slate of international placement options built on years of international collaboration.

Student-initiated international placements are not supported due to our commitment to international agencies that meet the school's criteria for mutually beneficial and sustained partnerships.

The International Committee decides all placement proposals and student candidate applications the summer prior to the spring final Practicum experience. Details of this process are provided in information sessions that begin in the February prior to the January international Practicum start.

## Required Responsibilities

For final Practicum, the placements align with the student's Clinical or APP concentration. In the placement process, the interests/needs of the student and the task/needs of the agency are the primary criteria for selection. Therefore, the assignments vary from agency to agency, student to student.

Course objectives that must be met for this placement are contained in the course syllabi and the competencies and related behaviors are further expanded upon and operationalized in the practicum evaluation forms. The assignments will be structured in such a way that the student will have the opportunity to demonstrate all the required competencies.

The majority of the internship will be focused on advanced work appropriate to an emerging professional and within their specialized concentration of Clinical or APP.

## Liaison Activities

A Faculty Liaison is assigned to each intern and Practicum Instructor in placement as a resource, support, and source of accountability. The final Practicum Faculty Liaison is typically less involved in the student's internship than in the generalist experience. This is because students have completed most of their graduate coursework, developed a stronger sense of social work identity, learned more effective use of supervision, and are transitioning from the role of graduate students into emerging professionals.

A liaison visit is a scheduled meeting with at least the Faculty Liaison, Practicum Instructor and intern for at least 30 minutes and may include additional staff/supervisors.

A liaison visit can happen in three different ways:

1. Site visit, in-person, face-to-face, any agreed upon location
2. Remote video conference visit
3. Remote audio conference visit

The default option for a conference visit is video due to the value of the additional non-verbal communication included. Audio is a secondary option.

### Liaison visits, assignment due dates for full block

Spring only, 500 hours in one semester. Two liaison visits, one onsite and one remote, one per each half of the semester.

Assignment timeline

Weeks 1-5: Learning contact collected.

Weeks 6-10: Midterm evaluation completed and reviewed.

Weeks 11-15: Final evaluation and self-reflective narrative completed and submitted.

## **Liaison visits, assignment due dates for extended block**

Spring/Summer, 500 hours over two semesters: Three total liaison visits, two onsite and one remote, one per each third of the internship coinciding with midterm and final evaluation due dates.

### **Assignment timeline**

Weeks 2-8: Learning contact collected, no later than spring break.

Weeks 12-20: Midterm evaluations completed and reviewed.

Weeks 22-30: Final evaluation and self-reflective narrative completed and submitted.

The intern provides the self-reflective narrative to the Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison. The intern and Practicum Instructor complete the final evaluation and after review, the Faculty Liaison submits the finalized version to the OPE no later than the last day of the semester. The student's internship is terminated when the Faculty Liaison submits the completed final evaluation.

The Faculty Liaison will determine the ordering and timing of site or conference liaison visits with input from Practicum Instructor and intern. Any of the parties (student, Practicum Instructor, Faculty Liaison) may request additional liaison visits including site visits. The Faculty Liaison may also choose to conduct a third site visit in-persons especially if it is a new placement, new Practicum Instructor, or if there are other compelling reasons. The Faculty Liaison will determine the ordering of site or conference liaisons visits with input from the Practicum Instructor and the intern. The last day of extended Practicum is the last day of the nine-week summer course schedule.

## **Atypical internship liaison activities**

Work-based and dual degree placements should be liaised to according to their full or extended format.

The ADPE will assign faculty liaisons according to need for early selection agencies that have intern requirements before Practicum begins in January.

Internships 60 miles or further should be liaised with according to their full or extended format. However, due to the fact that student-initiated domestic long-distance placements are typically new or newly revived internships for the UT-SSW program, liaisons are required to conduct site visits prior to the mid-term evaluation due dates.

International placements require the same expectations as full-block placements with additional requirements for weekly journals and the additional use of teleconference calls directly with students and/or Practicum Instructors as necessary to support and/or augment social work education abroad. Site visits are required prior to the mid-term evaluation due dates.

## **Process recordings**

1. The intern must be an active party in the PR.
2. The intern submits the PR to the practicum instructor for comments in time to submit it to the faculty liaison with comments for review pre-and post mid-internship. The faculty liaison discusses the PR in liaison visits with the student and practicum instructor but does not provide written feedback. Two PRs due during the final internship.

3. The practicum instructor or faculty liaison may choose to substitute a video role play in lieu of a PR.
4. The practicum instructor or faculty liaison may require additional PRs as needed.

Midterm evaluations are collected midway through the internship. Final evaluations are submitted using the online evaluation links at the end of the internship. For full-block, midterm falls in March. For extended, midterm falls in April/May.

Self-reflection narratives are collected at the end of the internship for full and extended block and are designed to be shared among the intern, Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison.

The Faculty Liaison should review intern timesheets at the liaison visits and collect them monthly on canvas.

If the intern fails to submit a signed final evaluation, self-reflective narrative, or timesheets before grades are due, the Faculty Liaison may assign an incomplete or a grade earned depending on the circumstances around the delay.

## Section Four: General Practicum Policies

### Arranging Hours in Practicum

Students are expected to complete 400 hours in practicum for their first practicum placement, 200 hours in the fall semester and an additional 200 in the spring. On average, this works out to 15-16 hours per week. Students may accrue up to 20 hours toward the total count over the winter break if and only if it serves the needs of both the student and the agency.

Final Practicum students are expected to complete the requisite 500 hours in practicum. Final Practicum full block is completed in the spring semester at an average of 36-40 hours per week. Students and/or agencies may opt for extended block placements that run in the spring and summer semesters at approximately 20-25 hours per week. The last day of extended practicum is the last day of summer classes. Students may begin accruing Practicum hours as early as January 2 after they have paid for their malpractice insurance. Students are expected to begin administrative onboarding including initiating background checks, medical authorizations, etc., beginning in the semester prior to the internship's start. These hours do not count toward the practicum total unless they total 20 or more, as in the case of a new employee orientation. With approval from their Faculty Liaison, students who extend into the summer may increase their weekly hours to complete practicum as much as one month prior to the last business day of July if and only if that arrangement serves both the student and the agency's needs.

Students are entitled to a fall break in late November and a spring break in keeping with the UT calendar unless there are compelling agency-based responsibilities that would require their participation as interns. If a student does not get spring break off due to agency needs, they are entitled to the equivalent amount of time on different dates as negotiated with their Practicum Instructor. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these breaks in order to rejuvenate for the semester. Some students may minimize their time off in order to maximize their ability to accrue hours.

Students should be off for a minimum of three weeks at the winter break since they are not allowed to accrue more than 20 hours during that time span. Students are entitled to a week off at the spring/summer semester turn, typically around graduation. As in the workplace, time off from responsibilities should be negotiated well in advance with the students' supervisor(s).

Within these frameworks, practicum agencies are for the most part open to negotiating students' hours in practicum in service of both the student and the needs of the agency and its clients. There are some general guidelines:

1. Students' hours should overlap the practicum instructor's schedule the majority of the time.
2. Students should target large blocks of time for agency service. This minimizes transportation time to and from the agency. For first practicum interns, this



generally means either a Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday internship schedule.

3. Students must be willing to have some flexibility in their schedules if this is needed at the agency. Some evening or weekend hours may be required.
4. In the BSW and first year MSW programs, students may count their one-hour, weekly Practicum seminar toward their practicum hour total. Students may also take up to 30 minutes per week for journaling if appropriate. Practicum and agency orientations to the internship may also count towards the practicum-hour total.
5. Students should not consistently stay behind the estimated hours. Commitments beyond this may indicate that the learning contract needs to be renegotiated or that time management techniques need to be reviewed.
6. Students should monitor their hours and keep track of their progress toward completing the requisite number of hours. If extensions are needed for grading purposes, notice should be given in advance to the PI and faculty liaison.
7. Students may receive credit for remote hours as approved and coordinated with the PI.
8. Students must not be left alone in the agency. This includes coverage for staff meetings, retreats, or other agency “emergencies”. If this happens, students should notify their PI and faculty liaison immediately.
9. Students must not transport clients in the student’s or client’s vehicle, nor are they allowed to transport clients in agency vehicles. This is to protect students because they are not covered by university insurance for transportation in any way. Similarly, students are not allowed to handle bodily fluids in their placements.
10. Students with disabilities must contact UT’s Office of Disability and Access to seek approval for accommodations. Students are encouraged to work with the Faculty Liaison and Practicum Instructor to coordinate accommodations in the practicum setting.

## **Agency Documentation**

Students must submit all agency documentation in an appropriate format and in a timely fashion. Students should receive training on documentation during the agency orientation and have reasonable access to electronic documentation systems. The content of client records often follows a certain format to protect both the client and the agency. Initially, students may write drafts of client documentation to be reviewed and signed by the Practicum Instructor before being entered into the client file. Some Practicum Instructors or assigned staff may continue to sign off on all documentation. Students must be clear on this process and are expected to seek supervision as new situations arise. Students should not document anything in a client file without learning the proper agency procedures. Confidentiality of documentation is discussed later in this section.

## Completion of Hours and Absence from Practicum

All first Practicum interns are expected to complete 200 hours each in the fall and in the spring for a total of 400 hours. Failure to do so may result in a failing grade. Under compelling circumstances, a Faculty Liaison may choose to allow the student to receive an incomplete for the fall semester and support them in making arrangements to makeup needed hours over the winter break before the start of the spring semester. Incompletes are determined by the Faculty Liaison and should reflect the student's need for additional time due to circumstances beyond their control.

A student cannot begin accruing Practicum hours in the second semester of Practicum until a grade has been earned for the previous semester. When this cannot be accomplished, the student must postpone Practicum until eligible for matriculation into second semester Practicum.

Final practicum students are expected to complete 500 hours in practicum over the spring and spring/summer semesters.

1. It is the student's responsibility to inform the PI as soon as possible and prior to any absence from practicum. The PI should inform the faculty liaison of any concerns regarding student absence.
2. If a student is absent for a significant period of time there are four options.
  - a. Withdraw from practicum, with the consent of the faculty liaison and the Assistant Dean for Practicum Education.
  - b. Be assigned by the ADPE to repeat the semester either in the same or a different agency.
  - c. Take an incomplete and finish the next time that practicum semester is offered.
  - d. Earn a failing grade in first practicum or fail to receive credits for final practicum.
3. Holidays: Students may take all university holidays and whatever holidays are observed by the agency. Students must still meet the requisite practicum hours. If a student elects to work a holiday, such as spring break, those hours would accrue toward the required practicum hours. Students are encouraged to negotiate these potential days off while considering the responsibilities of the agency and their position. Students do not accrue hours not served in practicum, i.e., when the university is open for holiday but an agency is not.
4. Inclement weather days: Students do not accrue hours when not in practicum and will need to make up hours missed due to inclement weather.

## **Change of Placement due to Educational Environment**

If the student or PI has concerns that the educational environment at their internships will not allow them to demonstrate the required competencies:

1. The student and/or PI should begin to address the concerns in supervision. If this is not immediately possible, the Faculty Liaison may be a resource, and can problem solve with the student or PI and encourage and support addressing the concerns in the supervisory relationship.
2. The student and/or PI must communicate with the Faculty Liaison about the concerns if they remain unresolved and are threatening the educational experience of the student.
3. If the concerns are determined unable to be reconciled and the result of the environment, e.g., a change in agency leadership or reduction in supervisory staff, then, in consultation with the student, the Faculty Liaison or PI may decide a student should be moved.
4. If the decision is made to move the student, the Faculty Liaison will identify a suitable agency and make arrangements for a different internship. This can take time and may delay a student completing the requisite hour for the semester or internship.
5. If the decision to move the student occurs within the first two weeks of the placement and the student has been actively involved in appropriate activities, the student may be excused from making up that time. However, beyond two weeks, the student may need to negotiate an appropriate number of approved hours to ensure sufficient time in the new placement.
6. As a representative of the agency, the PI retains the right to terminate a student's placement in their organization of program. The UTSSW expects conference around the issues whether to explore continuation at the agency or in seeking understanding about the reasons for the change as they relate to the placement or the student.
7. The faculty liaison will be in consultation with the ADPE for all placement changes.

## **Emergency Support for Practicum Hours**

One of the challenges all social workers face is learning how to maintain professional fidelity in the workplace when significant life events and challenges occur. Students in practicum are expected to develop and practice this skill by communicating with their faculty liaison and practicum instructor about how best to navigate these challenges.

Considerations:

1. Educational wholeness: The student is entitled to complete practicum education without qualitative reduction. Clinical faculty liaisons are positioned to make this assessment in keeping with CSWE expectations.
2. Need beyond the student's control: Adjustments to student responsibilities should be in response to exceptional external circumstances, not experiences common to the majority of students. Faculty liaisons should bring collective concerns for multiple students in class to the ADPE for consideration of programmatic response.

3. Respect for community-based partner needs: Agencies invest significant planning and resources into internships and the needs of these settings as ongoing educational supports merit respectful consideration and consultation.
4. Equity for peers: Adjustments for individual students need to be weighed in balance against fairness to other interns in the cohort.

Adjustment opportunities include:

1. Student earns an Incomplete for the semester if the student is not able to demonstrate the competencies and complete the hours within the internship time frame.
2. Up to 20-hours of approved online training toward the total number of practicum hours. The PI may provide approved online training opportunities and the OPE will provide additional options. Faculty liaisons should refer preferred online training options to the OPE for addition to the approved list of practicum trainings.

Each option requires student consultation with PI and FL and may be initiated by the student, the PI, or the FL, and is determined by the FL in consultation with the ADPE as needed.

Each option requires PI and FL approval. Students who initiate alternatives prior to consultation will negate the alternative opportunities for the semester.

Each option requires the FL to email justification and adjustments (i.e., incomplete, online training alternatives) to the ADPS prior to the last day of class for the semester in which the adjustments are applied. The FL should not grant adjustments for more than five students/semester without ADPE consultation since this could indicate a broader cohort need.

If these adjustments would not meet the student's needs, the student should be referred to their academic advisor to learn more about additional options including academic withdrawal, etc.

### **When a Student is Not Making Satisfactory Progress in Practicum**

1. When a student is not progressing at a satisfactory rate, the PI must notify the FL as soon as a significant problem or pattern or problems becomes evident.
  - a. The FL will arrange a conference with the PI as soon as possible.
  - b. The student, PI, and FL are involved in the analysis of the problem.
  - c. The student is given formal notification that the performance is substandard, and the concerns are tied to the student standards through a level review process.
  - d. Guidelines are developed for the student to follow in raising the standard of performance. These are given to the student in writing.
  - e. If the student does not meet the requirements, a failing grade may be earned and the level review process may escalate as appropriate.

2. When it is possible that a student may demonstrate the competencies if provided extra time:
  - a. The PI, FL, and student will discuss the student's rate of progress. If the student can demonstrate the practicum competencies given extra time and attention, then a plan will be developed. This must be a joint decision, based on the following: the student's work to date, the agencies willingness to commit continues resources, the PI's willingness to commit extra time, and the student's commitment to the identified plan.
  - b. If the agency is unwilling to continue to host the student, the FL will work with the student to replace the student in a new practicum agency. The student is expected to share concerns and conditions from the foreshortened practicum experience with the new PI in supervision and on the learning contract in the new setting.
  - c. A specific amount of extra time, usually 4 to 6 weeks, may be allotted at the end of the semester for the student to continue in practicum. This does not represent an absolute date for the end of practicum but is a target that will be reevaluated as the end of that period is reached.
  - d. If the student has not demonstrated the competencies of practicum by the end of the extra period, then the following options exist and will be determined by the FL and the ADPE:
    - i. the student may repeat the semester providing the availability of a current practice seminar.
    - ii. the student may earn a failing grade.
3. If the student does not wish to spend the extra time necessary to successfully complete the practicum assignment, the options are as follows:
  - a. Withdraw from practicum, with the consent of the FL and ADPE
  - b. Be assigned by the ADPE to repeat the semester either in the same agency or a different one
  - c. Earn an Incomplete grade and finish the next time that practicum semester is offered
  - d. Earn a failing grade.
4. Documentation of student progress may be assessed using the following tools:
  - a. Direct observation of skills and behavior in practicum
  - b. Client records and documentation
  - c. Process recording and journals
  - d. Feedback from agency staff or other professionals
  - e. Written work
  - f. Use of supervision

## **Removal of a Student from Practicum**

A student may be removed from practicum under the following circumstances:

1. Request of the student, with the consultation with the FL, PI and approval from the ADPE.
2. Decision of the ADPE, in consultation with the FL and PI. The following are grounds to remove the student from practicum.

- a. Failure to maintain confidentiality about a client as mandated by agency polity and/or the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Texas Board of Social Work Examiners Code of Conduct.
- b. Failure to abide by the NASW Code of Ethics and the TSBSWE Code of Conduct.
- c. An attempt to hurt oneself.
- d. An attempt to hurt someone else.
- e. Repeated tardiness at the agency and/or tardiness without notification.
- f. Repeated absences from the agency and/or absence without notification.
- g. Repeated change in scheduled practicum hours without prior approval.
- h. Inappropriate behavior in connection with the practicum placement.
- i. Unresolved student standard violations whether or not they are addressed in a level review.

The ADPE will make the final decision regarding removal from practicum, with documentation from the Practicum Instructor, agency, and Faculty Liaison. The student may appeal the decision following the guidelines in the official UT School of Social Work catalog. Whether the student will be allowed to return to practicum in the same or a different agency will depend on the seriousness of the incident and/or the ability of the student to work through the problem. Students who are not allowed to return to practicum will earn a failing grade for the course and a level review. The ADPE will have the responsibility to work with the student around the issues and may specify conditions for a return to practicum.

A student will earn a failing grade in practicum and not be replaced in the same semester if they are terminated from two or more agencies due to their own lack of performance or other failure to meet the expectations in their setting. The ADPE and Faculty Liaison determine if the responsibility falls to the student with input from the Practicum Instructor and agency staff.

First Practicum MSSW candidates may choose to retake practicum in a subsequent semester in which it is offered. A failing grade in practicum for final practicum will result in dismissal from the program.

## **Grievance Process**

The grievance process as stated in the School of Social Work MSSW Student Handbook applies to the termination of a student from Practicum. The process is designed to give the student further channels for appeal of the decision made regarding termination from Practicum. Although a student will be involved in the decision-making process, should the student wish to appeal a decision made, the first step is with the Graduate Advisor, the Graduate Studies Committee and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for the School. If the student wishes a further appeal, the formal procedures are outlined in the MSSW Student Handbook.

## **Student Standards for Social Work Education**

Due to the nature of professional social work practice, the School of Social Work has different expectations of students than do non-professional programs. These standards highlight key criteria for admissions and continuance that are linked to students' abilities to be effective social work professionals. This document formalizes the standards so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address concerns. The ultimate goal of the standards is to help students have a successful experience in the School of Social Work.

All social work students will be provided with and expected to read the Student Standards and NASW Code of Ethics and the TBSWE Code of Conduct. Students will then be asked to sign an acknowledgment that they have read and will abide by the documents. The acknowledgment form will be kept in the students' files. The Student Standards and complete NASW Code of Ethics can be found in the MSSW Handbook.

## **Mileage Reimbursement**

Agencies are encouraged to provide mileage reimbursement to students. Students will need to inquire at the beginning of Practicum about agency procedures for obtaining mileage reimbursement for home visits and other required travel. Many agencies are not able to provide mileage reimbursement.

## **Malpractice Liability Insurance**

Both the University and practicum agencies require that all social work students in practicum placement be covered by a professional malpractice liability insurance policy to protect both the agency and the individual against malpractice liability claims. All graduate social work students in practicum courses must obtain this coverage prior to entering practicum placement and must be covered for the duration of their practicum placement.

Students are able to meet this professional malpractice liability insurance requirement by participating in the school's blanket liability program underwritten by Wortham Insurance & Risk Management of Austin as approved by the UT Board of Regents. The limits of liability under this policy are \$2,000,000 each claim/\$6,000,000 aggregate, the policy period is from August 31 to August 31, and coverage is only while the student is in practicum. Specific information as to how students obtain this coverage is made available to students in the practicum placement process. There are additional limitations when applied to international Practicum.

Under this insurance policy, students are not covered for any claims relating to the operation of motor vehicles, whether personal or agency vehicle. Since the University has ruled that students cannot provide services for which they are at risk without liability coverage, students may not transport clients within practicum as part of their internship program. Agencies cannot ask or allow students to transport clients while in practicum placement. Similarly, students are not allowed to handle bodily fluids in their placements. New agencies are made

aware of this in the screening and onboarding process and practicum instructors sign a statement acknowledging this at the beginning of every internship.

## **Cultural Competence and Practicum Education**

The School of Social Work actively supports the need for students to increase their cultural competence during their professional education. Most students will take a semester-long course entitled Social Justice in which they will learn more about themselves, about other groups, and about the process of becoming a culturally competent social work practitioner.

At its most basic level, cultural competence consists of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowledge includes an understanding of oneself, information about cultural customs and practices of various groups, and an awareness of the dynamics of oppression. Skills include various elements, such as bilingualism, interpersonal skills, behavior consistent with cultural norms, social advocacy skills, etc. Attitude includes components such as genuine openness/curiosity, willingness to risk, generosity, and forgiveness. Practicum Instructors are encouraged to use the supervisory relationship to both challenge and support the knowledge, skills, and attitudes demonstrated by students.

A resource for increasing cultural competence is the following *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* adopted by NASW in 2015.



# Section Five: Evaluations and Grading

## Evaluation of Student Performance and Grading

Evaluation in Practicum is the determination of whether the student has satisfactorily achieved the educational objectives and demonstrated the competencies of the Practicum sequence. Evaluation is viewed as a process that is jointly undertaken with the student, Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison participating. Key elements in the process include:

- A delineation of the student's present capabilities in terms of knowledge, values, skills, affective and cognitive processes.
- Identifying areas where growth is needed including what the student has already accomplished and not accomplished toward demonstrating the competencies.
- Determining specifically what must be done in the future to address any concerns and/or refine abilities.

Grades and/or credit earned are assigned by the Faculty Liaison, based on input obtained from the Practicum Instructor during the liaison visits and liaison assessment of student progress. First Practicum is graded on a letter grade basis and students must earn a C or better in order to receive credit. Final Practicum is graded as credit/no credit. Students who do not receive credit for final practicum are not allowed to repeat and therefore cannot complete the master's program at the School of Social Work.

Student progress may be reflected in verbal presentation of material, interaction with clients and collateral contacts, discussion of assignments with the Practicum Instructor and Faculty Liaison, journal entries, process recordings and case documentation, and interaction with other personnel within the setting. Students are expected to uphold the NASW Code of Ethics, the Texas Board of Social Work Examiner's (TBSWE) Code of Conduct, and the UT-SSW Student Standards. Practicum objectives represent the minimum expectations of performance at the completion of each semester.

Evaluation of student performance in practicum is an ongoing process throughout the placement period, with the student's participation an integral part of this process. Practicum Instructors are expected to give ongoing feedback to their students. Assessment is used to help students examine their educational progress in meeting the objectives of practicum instruction. It is intended that the student will develop ongoing self-awareness to serve as the foundation for future learning and development.

The forms for evaluation are provided as an educational tool and actual evaluations should be completed online using the evaluation link provided by the Office of Practicum Education. The OPE recommends that the student and Practicum Instructor share the task of completing the evaluation forms to promote ongoing dialogue and understanding about achievement of the educational objectives and demonstrating the competencies.

## **Grading the First Practice Course and Practicum**

First Practicum and the practice courses are taken concurrently. Therefore, satisfactory progress in both class and practicum is expected. If a student fails practicum and is able to retake practicum the next semester it is available, they will be required to also retake the associated practice class concurrently regardless of grade previously earned in that class. Students may not carry an incomplete in either course into the next semester. Students must receive a C or better in first semester to continue. Syllabi for the practice courses are provided to the student at the beginning of the semester.

## **Grading for Final Practicum**

The Faculty Liaison assigns credit earned based on student progress as outlined above. Final Practicum is credit/no credit and students who do not receive credit for final practicum will not be allowed to retake final practicum and instead will be released from the program. Students in final practicum may fail to earn credit because of:

1. Unresolved and/or escalating concerns tied to Student Standards including NASW and TBSWE codes and addressed through the Level Review Process outlined in the MSSW Guide.
2. Persistent failure to demonstrate the required competencies.
3. Egregious ethical violations or behavior otherwise harmful to others.

## **Procedures for Evaluation of Practicum**

### **Student Evaluation of the Practicum Experience**

Each student is expected to provide feedback on an ongoing basis directly to their Practicum Instructor regarding maximizing student learning in the agency setting. Recognizing that this can be a challenge in some situations, students are expected to provide feedback to their Faculty Liaison regarding the strength of educational opportunities, supervisory experience and overall internship. Students are surveyed upon exiting the program regarding their practicum experience with the Faculty Liaison, OPE, internship setting, Practicum Instructor, and integration of classroom and Practicum curriculum. Students are encouraged to use this anonymous, protected venue for providing valuable feedback in service of improving the practicum experience for all students. This information is then used by the Assistant Dean for Practicum Education and the Practicum Education Committee in making decisions regarding the future use of the agency and Practicum Instructor. Urgent issues raised by students in practicum are routinely addressed in liaison visits and, as necessary, with the intervention of the OPE. Students should bring concerns about their placement to the attention of their Faculty Liaison as soon as possible so that concerns may be addressed promptly.

### **Practicum Instructor Evaluation of the Practicum Program**

Practicum Instructors are also given an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the placement process, the Faculty Liaison, the training workshops, and the Practicum program in general. Practicum Instructors receive questionnaires twice annually at the Practicum Instructor Workshops and this information is reviewed by the ADPE and communicated to the Practicum committee to make changes to improve the program. Practicum Instructors also

provide feedback on the practicum program through the ongoing communication with the Faculty Liaisons and the OPE.

### **Faculty Liaison Evaluation of the Agency Setting**

In addition to ongoing monitoring of and communication with staff at the Practicum settings, the ADPE and the Clinical Faculty members meet at the end of the spring semester to gather and share information regarding agencies and Practicum Instructors for use in future placement decisions. This process solicits information about the learning environment of the agency, the Practicum Instructor's level of expertise, the appropriateness of the learning assignments, the match between the student and the Practicum Instructor, and ways to make improvements in all of these. As a result of this evaluation, the OPE then creates an action plan for follow up with Practicum Instructors as needed in order to provide opportunity and investment in making necessary changes to maintain or reestablish strong internship experiences. It is the intent of the OPE to provide internship settings and Practicum Instructors with ample opportunity to redress concerns through authentic and timely feedback.

# **Section Six: Information for Maximizing the Practicum Experience**

## **Safety/Infection Control**

As in any community-based setting, students may find themselves in potentially dangerous situations. There have been situations in which student interns have been exposed to infectious diseases at their placement sites. Students may potentially be exposed to Hepatitis, TB, HIV, Covid, and/or other infectious diseases. Students in practicum placements will not be responsible for or asked to implement physical restraints, physical assistance, or any other physical contact with clients as part of the placement.

Students should not be left alone in the agency without professional staff. Leaving students alone on the premises or otherwise in charge during staff retreats, conferences, etc. is not an appropriate use of students. Students, no matter how competent or skilled, are not prepared to take on those types of staff responsibilities.

As partners in education, the agency, student, and the school share responsibility for making sure that the work environment is safe. In an effort to insure the physical health and safety of student interns, the following is recommended for agencies, students, and Faculty Liaisons:

## **Agency/PI Responsibilities**

1. Inform the students of potential safety risks.
2. Provide safety training. This includes training for students related to effective communication with clients and verbal techniques for de-escalating hostility and conflict.
3. Notify the practicum office via the assigned Faculty Liaison in the event that a student is involved in an unsafe situation including potential/actual exposure to contagious disease and/or incidents of physical violence/aggression perpetrated by a client.
4. Take steps to improve the safety of the work environment, including providing safety guidelines for working with clients in the office and in the client's home.
5. Inform students of potential health risks that exist in the practicum setting.
6. Provide training and education on universal precautions designed to reduce the risk of infection.
7. Inform the faculty liaison and/or practicum office immediately in the event that a student has been exposed to or is found to have contracted a communicable disease such as tuberculosis or hepatitis.
8. Refer students who are suspected to have contracted a communicable disease to the Austin Health and Human Services Department-Travis County Health Department (or the health department in the city where the agency is located) for testing and treatment.

## **Student Responsibilities**

1. Participate in training on infection control and safety as provided by the agency.
2. Request training on infection control and safety if not offered by the agency.
3. Follow guidelines for safety and infection control in place at the agency.

4. Report incidents of safety and infection exposure to the agency and to the practicum office.

## **Faculty Liaison Responsibilities**

1. Provide safety and infection control training at practicum orientation.
2. Monitor risk factors during agency liaison visits, agency workshops, in seminars, and journals.
3. Communicate incidents with the practicum office.
4. Discuss issues related to health and safety with Practicum Instructor and students as they arise.

## **The Code of Ethics**

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics is the most widely used statement of the profession's expectations for the conduct of social workers. The Code provides statements about what social workers should and should not do. The code is based on the fundamental values embodied in the profession and serves as a guide for our behavior in the following areas: our conduct as social workers; our responsibilities to clients; our ethical responsibility to employers and employing agencies; our ethical responsibilities to the profession; and our ethical responsibility to society. An abridged copy of the Code, as well as the Texas State Code of Conduct, is in the final section of this manual, and the complete Code can be found in the MSSW Student Handbook.

All students are expected to abide by the Code in their practice within the Practicum agency and within the first Practicum seminar. Discussions during the Practicum seminar and with the Practicum Instructor should help students in the understanding and internalizing of these principles. Through active self-examination of values, the values of the profession, the agency's services, and the clients' values, students will achieve a greater understanding of the Code.

## **Confidentiality**

The NASW Code of Ethics also serves as a guide for professional behavior concerning confidentiality of client matters. Confidentiality is not only an ethical concern, but a legal issue as well. Social workers, including student interns, are legally bound to safeguard the confidentiality of information concerning clients. Breaking client confidentiality is grounds for malpractice. The Code also prescribes behavior related to colleagues and co-workers and the responsibilities and obligations of social workers to their employing agencies.

In addition to the NASW Code of Ethics, students are expected to abide by any agency-based policy concerning confidentiality. The agency's policies usually cover areas such as: storage and maintenance of client records; what information, if any, can be shared about the client with persons outside of the agency; with whom can information be shared; how to obtain informed consent from a client to release information; internal procedures for discussing client concerns, etc. Students should request a copy of the agency's policy on client confidentiality during the agency orientation.

Discussions with Faculty Liaisons and in the first practicum integrative seminars about clients are educationally focused and are considered appropriate case consultations. Therefore, although standard precautions should be taken to de-identify information concerning clients, these discussions are covered under the NASW Code of Ethics. Agencies and Practicum Instructors are also aware that students must utilize client and agency information in order to complete classroom assignments and in Practicum seminar discussions. However, students within the seminar are bound by the Code to keep this information confidential.

Some guidelines for use of client and agency information in the Practicum Seminar include:

1. Information about clients, their relatives, and significant others used in written assignments such as process recordings, case assessments, logs, etc. should be deidentified to the greatest extent possible. Initials should be used to disguise names or names should be concealed.
2. Information that is highly personal and detailed should be reviewed to see if it needs to be used at all.
3. Process recordings should not become part of the client's file.
4. Materials on clients in which a court case is pending or suspected to be imminent should not be used to meet assignments.
5. Audio and/or video recordings of clients require informed consent releases by clients following agency guidelines. Students should discuss this with their Practicum Instructor prior to seeking client approval.
6. Supervision regarding confidentiality should be scheduled early during the orientation period.

## **Sexual Harassment**

In support of its Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action program, it is the policy of The University of Texas at Austin to maintain an educational environment free from sexual harassment and intimidation. Although the Practicum Office evaluates and monitors agencies on a continual basis, preventative steps should be taken to ensure that sexual harassment does not become part of the student's practicum experience; or, if it should occur, that the student has sufficient information to be able to deal effectively with it.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has defined sexual harassment as follows:

"Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of Sec. 703 of Title VII. Unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment."

Such conduct on the part of supervisors or co-workers is expressly prohibited and the offenders are subject to disciplinary action. The University's Equal Employment Opportunity Office is empowered to investigate complaints based on sexual harassment. If employees

believe that they are experiencing this type of conduct, they should immediately report any such incidents to the Equal Employment Opportunity Office located in Main Building 106M, 471-1849.

Toward that end, The University has formulated a policy that prohibits sexual harassment between faculty and students. This policy is formally stated in section four of the Handbook of Operating Procedures of the University.

The complete policy on sexual harassment can be found at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/policies/hopppm/04.B.02.html>

The complete policy on sexual misconduct can be found at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/policies/hopppm/04.A.03.html>

In addition, many Practicum agencies have agency policies that deal with sexual harassment. Students should obtain a copy of their agencies' personnel policy manual and be familiar with this information. Students should notify their Faculty Liaison immediately should they wish to explore any issue or situation that appears to involve sexual harassment.

## **Title IX Resources and Reporting**

The University is committed to providing an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex and gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence (including domestic violence and dating violence), and stalking (<https://titleix.utexas.edu/educate/>).

All Practicum Instructors and employees of the University including Faculty Liaisons supervising UT students are mandated reporters of Title IX related incidents. Mandated reporters are required to report known Title IX related incidents – current or historical – to either the UT-SSW Title IX Liaison, who is also the Assistant Dean for Practicum, or the University Title IX Coordinator. Title IX related incidents may be shared in any number of ways including but not limited to written assignments, classroom discussion, or supervision and all reports must be relayed to a Title IX officer.

Students entering the UT-SSW are oriented to Title IX resources and requirements upon entry to the program and are aware that Practicum Instructors are mandated reporters. Practicum Instructors are expected to work with the student on how the student choose to report a Title IX incident(s). For example, a student may choose to email the Title IX Liaison directly and include the Practicum Instructor. If the incident(s) in question is not impacting the student's Practicum performance in any way, a student may choose instead to report directly to the University Title IX Coordinator, thereby bypassing the Office of Practicum Education.

In service of the students' education, the University's goals are to:

1. Support the student regarding resources, rights, and accommodations available to them.
2. Assess and intervene with due process regarding potential threats to the student and/or university community.

3. Document the prevalence of Title IX related occurrences and accountable university response.

More information about Title IX may be found at <https://titleix.utexas.edu/>.



## **Section Seven: Guides**

**[Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers-English](#)**

**[Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers-Spanish](#)**

**[NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice](#)**

**[Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners Code of Conduct](#)**