

GUIDELINES FOR FIELD PRACTICUM IN PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT

Professional employment and learning are not inconsistent, but there is a difference of emphasis between the roles of students and of staff and the balance between the goals of educational development and delivery of service to clients. In adherence with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation standards, the School of Social Work has adopted basic policy guidelines for the development of a field practicum in the student's place of employment. These policies are designed to ensure the accomplishment of the educational goals and objectives.

1. When can the agency of employment be utilized as a practicum setting?

- a. When the agency has available either different divisions or learning assignments which will provide the student with practice experiences different from the current job description (i.e. different population served, method of service delivery, and role);

and

- b. When the agency has available a qualified, licensed MSW who can serve as the field instructor, and who is not the designated supervisor for the routine work tasks the student performs in the agency. This is to ensure in part that the field instructor is free to focus on the educational aspects of the practicum rather than the workload issues. The agency and the field instructor are expected to make a commitment to provide 1 hour of field instruction weekly to the student. If the field instructor has never supervised a graduate student before, it is necessary to participate in a Field Instructor Orientation and Field Instructor Training Sessions (FITS);

and

- c. When the agency and the Graduate Program of Social Work can agree that the assignments given to a paid practicum student are consistent with the educational objectives of the Program, and that the assignments (client caseload, groups) show evidence of sound educational design and planned development of the student's skills.

While some employment situations have the potential to be developed as the student's field placement site, many do not. Situations that are more likely to be approved include:

- Large systems where the student's placement can take place in an entirely different division or unit than the area of employment.
- Vastly different roles that ensure new learning – for instance, the student has an administrative role as an employee (e.g. finance, development, etc.), and the student role involves direct service to clients.

Conversely, some situations are not appropriate for the Practicum in Place of Employment. These include:

- Agencies that are very small or are highly-specialized private practice settings;
- Agencies owned and/or operated by student's relatives (marriage or birth);
- Students who are in a position of authority (CEO, Director, etc.) or are self-employed;
- Agencies that have existed for less than 1 year and/or have not yet developed or implemented formal operating policies and procedures; and
- Agencies under investigation or that have been sanctioned for fraudulent or unethical activities.

2. What is the procedure for initiating a request for paid practicum?

In developing paid placements it is expected that students will take the initiative by making the proposal to the Director of MSW Field Education and by following the Self-initiated Placement Process. In addition:

- a. The "Field Practicum Agreement in Place of Employment" form must be approved and signed by all parties, then reviewed and approved by the Director of MSW Field Education, prior to the beginning of the field practicum. (Students are advised to send a draft of the proposal to the field director for preliminary review, before gathering the signatures.)
- b. The student is advised that if the employer-based placement is found to be unacceptable, the student then must agree to another placement approved by the MSW field director or there may be a possibility of beginning the practicum at a later time.
- c. It will be the responsibility of the field faculty liaison to determine in an ongoing fashion that the practicum in place of employment is consistent with the educational objectives of the MSW program and the proposal made by the student. If assignments do not meet the Field Education Contract and if no attempt has been made to alter the assignments, the placement may be terminated.

Portions of this policy were adapted from University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work and from Clarke University, Dubuque, IA.