

University of Maine School of Social Work
POLICY FOR FIELD PRACTICUM AND HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDELINES DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC
Summer 2021

Preamble

The School of Social Work (SSW) at the University of Maine is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and regulated by CSWE's Council on Accreditation (COA) Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). Social Work Students at the University of Maine (BSW and MSW degrees) must participate in field practicum as part of their accreditation and license requirements. This field practicum training is carried out primarily off-campus, at a wide variety of locations with partner agencies. If students cannot complete the required field practicum experiences, they cannot progress and graduate on time, will not be eligible for licensure, and will not be eligible to work as a professional social worker.

The Council of Social Work Education and CSWE's Council on Accreditation has provided guidance to Schools of Social Work to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on field education. The most recent version of that guidance can be found here:

<https://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Information/Accreditation-COVID19-Response>.

During the Summer of 2021, we believe that social work students in field practicum experiences will be able to follow the lead of field practicum agencies, University of Maine policies, and State of Maine and Federal CDC guidance to complete field practicum in accordance with CSWE guidance and CSWE's COA EPAS accreditation standards. The School of Social Work, the College, and the University of Maine are following the guidance from the University of Maine System for Summer 2021 General operations, available here: <https://www.maine.edu/together/community-guidance/everyone/>.

Field practicum agencies are unique; some agencies may be continuing to provide remote-only services, some may be offering a mix of remote and face-to-face services, while others have returned to face-to-face services. We believe that by following the policies contained in this document, students may provide services in the manner best suited to the client system's needs as determined by the field practicum agency.

The University of Maine System provides the following COVID-19 Risk Statement: "The University consistently seeks to take steps to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infections (or any other spread of disease) in accordance with applicable law, regulation, and guidance provided by health authorities. These efforts may include policies and safeguards implemented by the University such as symptom checks, social distancing, use of facial coverings, and isolating and quarantining when required. Despite these efforts, the University cannot categorically guarantee that any person entering University campuses or facilities will not contract COVID-19 or any other communicable disease and any such person must assess and accept the risks of illness or injury for themselves." By extension, the School of Social Work asserts this risk statement also applies to students in field practicum experiences and entering field practicum agencies.

The School of Social Work has tried to recognize and accommodate the unique health and safety needs of students during the field practicum placement process. Should students have concerns about health and safety during the assigned field practicum, it is the student's responsibility to immediately communicate those to the assigned faculty liaison. The faculty liaison will assist the student in problem

solving, discussing concerns with the agency, and/or bringing concerns to the attention of the field director, following procedures about concerns in field practicum in the program's respective field manual.

The School of Social Work also recognizes that there may be circumstances beyond the control of Field Agencies and their staff, the University, and Students that may necessitate a return to remote only field attendance, or result in a short-term disruption of field practicum attendance. These circumstances include but are not limited to a Student's illness or exposure to COVID-19 or other communicable disease; a student's directions from a medical provider to self-quarantine or self-isolate; or a Student's household member's illness with COVID-19 or other communicable disease; a COVID-19 or other communicable disease outbreak at a Field Practicum Agency; or a University or Government stay at home order due to COVID-19 or other communicable disease. We also recognize there may be instances where a student's practicum is terminated due to these health and safety concerns and/or other circumstances beyond the student's control.

In response to the above, The School of Social Work at the University of Maine has developed the following policies to address disruptions to students' social work field practicums due to national or local events including COVID-19.

Policy

Health and Safety:

It is the policy of the School of Social Work to consider the field practicum and field practicum agency an extension of the University of Maine Campus. All students are expected to follow the health and safety guidance of the UMS system, the University of Maine, the placement agency, and the Maine CDC. Should any one of these entities have more stringent requirements, the student should follow the most stringent requirement(s).

Given the rapidly changing nature of health and safety guidelines during the pandemic it is impossible to list all here. Students should remain vigilant to guidance changes at the UMS and State of Maine levels, and engage in regular conversation with their field practicum agencies around guidance changes.

At a minimum, students should:

- **Know the symptoms**
 - Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, shortness of breath, and lower respiratory distress, and may appear 2-14 days after exposure. If you, or someone you know, is exhibiting these symptoms, contact your medical provider.
- **Take precautions**
 - Stay 6 feet away from other people. Wear [a cloth face covering \(PDF\)](#) as recommended by the UMS System and CDC in public settings. Wash your hands often, and for at least 20 seconds. Cover all coughs and sneezes.
- **COVID-19 testing**
 - The state allows anyone over the age of 12 months to receive a test without a physician's order. It remains advised to contact your medical provider to determine whether you should be tested. [Find your nearest testing location](#). The University of Maine's testing information can be found here: <https://umaine.edu/return/>.
- **Face coverings**
 - At the time of this policy, Maine has mandated wearing a face covering in public settings, with the exception of outdoors. The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine

CDC) recommends that people wear face coverings in outdoor settings where it is difficult to maintain physical distancing. Face coverings are still required for indoor public settings. More information can be found at <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/>.

- At the time of this policy, the University of Maine requires face coverings at all times when indoors on University property or in University administered facilities and at all other times when indoors on University business. More information can be found at <https://www.maine.edu/together/community-guidance/everyone/>.

Vaccination

At the time of this policy, the University of Maine system recommends University members consider voluntary vaccination against COVID-19. You can find information about exceptions to UMS policies about testing and quarantine for fully vaccinated individuals and information about how to verify vaccination status with the UMS system here: <https://www.maine.edu/together/community-guidance/students/>.

The School of Social Work encourages all students to talk to their health care providers to find out more about vaccination. Information can also be found here: <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/vaccines>.

Attendance

The School of Social Work, the College, and the University of Maine are following the guidance from the University of Maine System for Summer 2021 General operations, available here: <https://www.maine.edu/together/community-guidance/everyone/>. All students may attend field practica in-person following the health and safety guidelines in this policy, should that option present itself.

If a student is having difficulty starting their field practicum due to a COVID-19 related delay, the student should request a meeting within one week of the start date of their field practicum with their SSW Faculty Field Liaison and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (if and as available) to create a unique plan for additional remote learning experiences. The resulting decisions will be added to the student's learning plan and counted towards completion of the required hours.

All students are expected to remain in their field practicums for the duration of the student's contracted practicum. Students may not change their expected method of attendance to field practicums without the permission of both their agency Field Instructor/Site Supervisor(s) and SSW Faculty Field Liaison. No students may end the practicum earlier than contracted with the Field Agency without the express permission of their Field instructor/Site Supervisor and the SSW faculty liaison and SSW Field Team.

Contingency Plan

All students should work with their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor during the first two weeks of the semester to create a contingency plan for remote attendance and/or alternative learning activities to be used if needed in the case of a stay at home order/return to remote only work/ or short-term field practicum disruption. The faculty liaison will instruct students how to turn in their contingency plan. See the procedure at the end of this document.

Stay at Home Order /Return to Remote Work Only/Short-Term Disruption

If students are advised by their Field Agency, Field Instructor/Site Supervisor, the University of Maine and/or State/federal Government to not attend their field practicum in-person and transition to a remote only attendance or if safety concerns warrant an anticipated short-term disruption in field practicum attendance, students should **immediately** consult with **BOTH** their SSW Faculty Field Liaison and their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor. Students are expected to follow the contingency plan for the duration of practicum or until advised by the agency, university, and/or government to return to in-person

attendance.

Supervision

Students should coordinate continued and ongoing supervision with their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor/External Consultant throughout the duration of the practicum. Students may use a remote technology such as video-conferencing for supervision as needed due to health and safety concerns.

Students are not to substitute consultation with SSW faculty, SSW Faculty Field Liaison, or additional assignments provided by SSW faculty for supervision or field practicum hours unless requested in writing by the Agency Field Instructor/Site Supervisor or unless the student's practicum has been terminated by the agency due to health and safety concerns.

Absence due to Illness/Exposure

Students who are showing symptoms of COVID-19 or other communicable disease; have experienced a potential exposure to COVID-19 or other communicable disease; have been advised by a medical provider to self-quarantine or self-isolate; or are caring for a household member who is ill with COVID-19 or other communicable disease, should:

1. **immediately contact BOTH their SSW Faculty Field Liaison and their Field Supervisor(s)/ Instructors and;**
2. **self-report to UMS system (call the COVID-19 info line: 207.581.2681 OR email umaine.alerts@maine.edu). Students should also contact their health care provider as needed; and**
3. **should not attend field practicum in-person until medically cleared and following all CDC, UMS, and agency recommended guidelines.** Students who have been fully vaccinated and have experienced potential exposure to COVID-19 should look for most updated information about quarantine and isolation from Umaine.

During any absence, students may transition to following their contingency plan OR request time off from the practicum. Students must notify **both** their SSW Faculty Field Liaison and their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor of their unique needs.

Termination of Field Placement/Agency Closure

If the student's Field Instructor/Site Supervisor indicates to the student and the SSW Faculty Field Liaison that the student cannot continue in the field practicum due to Field Agency closure or a Field Agency decision not to continue hosting students due to health and safety concerns, the SSW Faculty Field Liaison and the SSW Field Team will work with the student to attempt to resolve the issue and replace or augment the student's practicum experience. .

The student's practicum experience may need to be delayed or repeated if there is not an available resolution to the disruption that meets the requirements to complete the field practicum consistent with CSWE guidance and CSWE's COA EPAS.

Incompletes/Exemptions

If a student needs an accommodation to complete the field practicum hours due to a COVID related absence, grades of incomplete may be offered to students who are able complete their field practicum hours within University incomplete timelines. The Student, SSW Faculty Field Liaison, and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (s) must communicate to ensure an individualized plan is developed with the student.

Students should read and understand the **POLICY FOR REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION OF FIELD PRACTICUM HOURS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Summer 2021). It may be possible to request an exemption from field hours in the case of COVID related absences.

If a student needs an accommodation to complete the field practicum hours due to a COVID related absence AND is NOT able to complete their field practicum within University incomplete timelines, despite a request for an exemption, that student should request to meet with the SSW Faculty Field Liaison and the SSW Field Team to discuss individualized options. Individualized options may include a leave of absence, a medical withdrawal, or a determination of whether the field course will need to be delayed or repeated.

Procedure For Creating Contingency Plans in case of Stay at Home Order /Return to Remote Work Only/Short-Term Disruption

1. If a student is having difficulty starting their field practicum due to COVID-19, the student should request a meeting with the SSW Faculty Field Liaison and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (if and as available) to create a plan for additional remote learning experiences. The resulting decisions must be added to the student's learning plan.
2. During the first two weeks of the semester, all students must meet with their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor to create a contingency plan for continuing the practicum in the case of a Stay at Home Order /Return to Remote Work Only/Short-Term Disruption.
3. The contingency plan should include the methods and procedures for continuing the field practicum remotely if possible. Remote attendance could include the use of teleconferencing, or other remote telecommunication platforms, telephone, and/or email.
4. The contingency plan must address how students will maintain client system confidentiality while in remote experiences. All students must comply with relevant laws, regulations, ethical standards, and organizational policies to ensure the confidentiality of clients. Students and agencies are encouraged to utilize the standards listed in the [NASW Code of Ethics](#) and the [Technology in Social Work Practice](#) guide to inform their use of technology. While each agency should develop their own protocols around the use of technology and confidentiality, the following best practices should be followed by all students:
 - a. Ensure any telecommunication technology used meets state and agency standards around confidentiality and HIPAA. **Note:** The University of Maine's standard Zoom license issued to students is **not** HIPAA compliant.
 - b. Take reasonable steps to maintain appropriate boundaries when using personal phone numbers or other electronic communication. For example, consider setting up a google voice telephone number to be used only for field or temporarily hiding your caller ID when making outgoing calls through your phone's settings.
 - c. Position web cameras so that all visible confidential data is removed from camera view.
 - d. Conduct all sensitive conversations in a private space. Be mindful of the potential for family members or bystanders to overhear any portion of your discussions.
 - e. Discuss and understand expectations for attire.
 - f. Discuss how to handle disruptions to client sessions due to technology issues on the part of the student or client.
 - g. Throughout supervision, discuss potential ethical dilemmas and self-care issues that may arise as a result of telehealth (ex. boundary confusion for client and/or you due to "being"

in each other's homes, difficulty leaving work, confidentiality in your home for your clients)

5. Students should identify specific continuing remote or alternative field learning activities they may be involved in should field practicums need to shift to remote-only attendance.
 - a. Students and their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor should use the 9 social work competencies as guidance while creating activities.
 - b. General suggestions are given below and a curated list is available here:
<https://umaine.edu/socialwork/field/field-instructor-resources/>.
 - i. Supervision: Weekly supervision using Zoom or other teleconferencing applications.
 - ii. Meetings with individuals, families, and groups utilizing teleconferencing applications that can be accessed via computer, tablet, and/or telephone; provided teleconferencing applications meet any agency requirements regarding HIPPA and/or confidentiality.
 - iii. Trainings for Agency: develop trainings that will benefit the agency (e.g., self-care, ethics, etc.)
 - iv. Groups/Workshops for Clients: develop curriculum for future implementation with clients (e.g., life skills, grief, trauma, domestic violence, etc.)
 - v. Written Materials for Clients or Community: develop handouts/flyers/brochures, resource guides (e.g., explain voting rights, informed consent policies, etc.)
 - vi. Organizational Policy Review: review agency policies with suggestions/recommendations where appropriate (e.g., safety policies, diversity policies, use of social media, utilization of technology, etc.)
 - vii. Legislative Policy Review: review relevant laws and policies impacting the population students work with (e.g., Indian Child Welfare Act, Emergency Mental Health Holds, Homeless Camping Ban, etc.) and provide a synopsis of key takeaways or prepare advocacy materials (letter to editor, develop key talking points, etc.)
 - viii. Literature Review: conduct a literature review on a specific topic relevant to field practicum (e.g., effectiveness of an intervention, how interruption of services impacts mental health or economic stability, etc.)
 - ix. Grants: research potential grant opportunities and/or prepare aspects of the grant writing.
 - x. Community Networking/Resource Development: teleconference with various service providers, participating in resource mapping, and develop a list of resources for clients with services offered, referral process, etc.
 - xi. Complete online trainings: complete assigned trainings and provide a certification of completion and/or a short written reflection and/or prepare a presentation to disseminate knowledge gained.

NOTE: The intention of this policy is to support current students for successful completion of field practicum during the Summer 2021 semester. This policy may be changed to reflect additional COVID-19 related demands as they develop. Students, faculty, and field agencies will be notified of changes as they occur.