

FIELD POLICY FOR COVID-19 PANDEMIC as of March 30,2020

Preamble

Please know that we continue to strive to do our best to support our students, our colleagues and our community as we face this unprecedented crisis. We have consulted as a Field Team, and have been part of the national conversation between accredited Schools of Social Work across the country, and the situation is changing daily. Our bottom line continues to be the safety and health of our students and colleagues and communities, which is why we suspended face-to-face field activities on March 17, and required students to develop plans to complete their field placements remotely, with specific exceptions approved by the field team.

The SSW is committed to supporting our students' successful completion of this semester, including their field placements. We have worked with faculty, field liaisons, other field directors and other willing community partners to create meaningful assignments that can be completed remotely to continue student learning as we pivot to face this health crisis. The field team and the faculty can support and supervise students if their field instructors are not able or available.

We recognize the number of challenges students, faculty and agencies are managing during this unprecedented time. After thoughtful deliberation and consultation with multiple stakeholders, we have designed this policy to attempt to accommodate the varying needs of all. We are hearing that many of our students have made plans with their field instructors to complete field practicum remotely, and some students are in fact continuing to meet with clients either remotely or in one very rare case, with the team's approval, person to person.

We recognize that On March 25th the Counsel of Social Work Education announced a statement clarifying accreditation standards required for programs as well as minimum requirements for students whose total field completion dates occur by December 31, 2020 and are impacted by COVID-19:

<https://www.cswe.org/News/General-News-Archives/CSWE-Statement-on-Field-Hour-Reducation>

Important to note, here at the University of Maine, we are maintaining the previously required number of hours for all students (now including seminar hours advancing forward as part of those hours) unless a student identifies that they cannot meet that requirement due to personal and professional reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In those cases, we are requiring a waiver request and each case will be reviewed individually. See policy below.

Policy

In order to minimize the risks of any discrepancy with multiple state licensing regulations, the current policy remains that students will meet their minimum required hourly accrual: 400 hours total for BSWs; and 900 hours total for MSWs.

Any student having difficulty, should reach out to their field instructor, their faculty liaison (seminar instructor), or a member of the field team to support the successful completion of the practicum and the semester. We will consider exceptions on a case by case basis: waivers may be developed to support specific needs or requests. Communication is critical: without your input and feedback, we cannot respond, support or problem-solve.

We'd like to share the rationale for maintaining the original expectations for hourly accrual. Although the Maine State SW Licensing Board does not stipulate a specific number of required hours, some states do. We do not want to put licensure at risk for those that may want to practice in other states. Many students and field instructors have been able to make plans for meaningful remote assignments, and we want to support students' optimal learning. Professionals across social services, health care and human services are having to pivot to respond appropriately, and there is tremendous opportunity to learn and to contribute.

There are several sections of the Social Work Code of Ethics that have informed our thinking and expectations. Sections 1.15 and 1.17 of the standards pertaining to SW responsibilities to clients, stipulate that social workers should terminate appropriately and avoid abandonment of clients, as well as making "reasonable efforts to ensure the continuity of services." It is our professional responsibility to make every effort to terminate in a thoughtful manner with clients, and to maintain relationships with the field instructors and the agencies. The standard specifically related to public emergencies, 6.03 asserts "Social workers should provide appropriate professional services in public emergencies to the greatest extent possible." By continuing to require students complete full field hours remotely, we are working to balance ethical professional practice, optimal learning and the health and safety of students, clients, faculty and the community.

As noted above, agencies have generally been flexible and responsive in supporting remote projects and activities. It seems that many students are on track to complete their field hours. However, if students cannot meet their original hourly accrual, for a variety of personal and professional reasons due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they may request a waiver or an incomplete.

BSW and MSW Specialization Year Students ONLY: If students are unable to complete their full hourly accrual, they may request to WAIVE up to 15% of the total required field hours for the practicum they are currently completing.

- BSW Students may request to waive up to 60 hours of total BSW practicum hours.
- MSW **Specialization** Year students may request to waive up to 75 hours of specialization year practicum hours. MSW specialization year students must have achieved at least 400 hours while completing their generalist placement in order to request a waiver.

This option for reduced hours is only applicable to students whose total field completion dates occur by December 31, 2020, as per CSWE's March 25, 2020 statement.

MSW Generalist Year Students: If students are unable to complete their full hourly accrual, they may request to take an incomplete through the end of the summer 2020 semester. Students must contact their faculty liaison to request the incomplete and make arrangements to finish all required field hours before the start of the Fall 2020 semester. This option for incomplete is in accordance with the CSWE March 25, 2020 statement.

Procedure

To request a waiver, students should provide a written request to their faculty liaison and the Field Team that includes the following information:

- Name, Year of placement, Faculty Liaison. How many hours they have completed to date. How many hours are they requesting to be waived?
- A brief discussion of why they are unable to complete the original expectation.
- How will they meet the new minimum? When do they plan to finish?
- How will they terminate with clients, their field instructor, and the agency?
- When will they review/submit the final semester evaluation?

Students may submit their requests on or after April 1, 2020. Here is the link to the request form:

<https://forms.gle/pteqUCNB4CF7ucvD9>

This constitutes our best thinking at this time. The intention of this policy is to support current students for successful completion during the Spring 2020 semester. This policy may be changed to reflect additional demands as they develop.