

University of Maine School of Social Work
POLICY FOR FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
FALL 2020

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. Students who do not complete their field practicum experiences will not graduate with their degree, will not be eligible for licensure, and will not be eligible to work as a professional social worker. If our students cannot complete the required field practicum experiences, they cannot progress and graduate on time.

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, dated July 30, 2020, can be found here: <https://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/Information/Accreditation-COVID19-Response>.

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 opting into field practicum experiences and entering field practicum agencies.

The School of Social Work has worked with Faculty, SSW Faculty Field Liaisons, other Field Directors, students and willing community partner Field Instructor/Site Supervisor(s) to place students in field practicums that meet their individual health and safety needs. We have asked each student about their own individual health related needs and attempted to accommodate all requests while coordinating practicum sites.

During the fall of 2020, we believe that social work students opting-in to 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. 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.

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

Attendance

The School of Social Work, the College, the University of Maine, and our attorney/general counsel have had many discussions about fall learning opportunities given COVID-19, and have determined that students can opt in to clinicals, field practicums, and internships in essential industries, as long as they are aware of the risks associated with their particular situation and discuss any concerns with their academic program prior to beginning their course.

All students are required to complete the **SOCIAL WORK FALL 2020 FIELD PRACTICUM SURVEY** prior to the beginning of the semester. Completing this survey indicates that the student is opting in to the field practicum sequence and has read, understood and agreed to follow guidance in the following policies: **POLICY FOR FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020), **POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020), and **POLICY FOR REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION OF FIELD PRACTICUM HOURS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020).

Students are expected to follow all guidelines in the **POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020) prior to beginning or resuming any in-person attendance at field practicum.

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

The SSW will allow all students to count all attended field seminar classroom hours, synchronous or asynchronous, toward field hours. This time does not include regularly assigned course papers, projects, or field logs.

All students will work with their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor during the first two weeks of the semester to create a 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.

All students are expected to remain in their field practicums for the duration of the student's contracted practicum. The University of Maine will transition to remote-only classes after Thanksgiving break, and may do so sooner without warning; in all cases, students are expected to

remain in their practicums for the duration of the semester to complete the contracted field practicum.

Students may not change their expected method of attendance to field practicums without the express 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.

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 will be expected to follow the plan created for remote attendance and/or alternative learning activities for the duration of practicum or until advised by the agency, university, and/or government to return to in-person attendance.

All students are expected to continue in their field practicum for the duration of the contracted time with the agency. Students are expected to coordinate continued and ongoing supervision with their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor throughout the duration of the practicum. Students may use a remote technology such as Video-conferencing or telephone for supervision as needed.

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 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 **immediately contact BOTH their SSW Faculty Field Liaison and their Field Supervisor(s)/ Instructors** and **cease any in-person attendance** at the Field Agency and/or with client systems. See the **POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020).

Students must obtain medical clearance and follow all CDC recommended guidelines before returning to any in-person attendance at Field Agencies or with client systems. See the **POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020)

Students who are ill or have been exposed to COVID-19 or other communicable disease, or 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, may transition to following their remote/alternative learning experience 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.

Grades of incomplete may be offered for students who request time off from the practicum and are able return to and complete their field practicum hours within University timelines. The Student, SSW Faculty Field Liaison, and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (s) must communicate to ensure an individualized completion plan is developed with the student.

Students who take time off from field practicum AND are NOT able to complete their field practicum within University timelines due to illness or exposure to COVID-19 or other communicable disease, or have been advised by a medical provider to self-quarantine or self-isolate, or because they are caring for a household member who is ill with COVID-19 or other communicable disease, may request an exemption of no more than 15% of their field hours. Students must follow the **POLICY FOR REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION OF FIELD PRACTICUM HOURS DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC** (Fall 2020).

Students who take time off from field practicum and are NOT able to complete their field practicum within University timelines due to illness or exposure to COVID-19 or other communicable disease, or have been advised by a medical provider to self-quarantine or self-isolate, or because they are caring for a household member who is ill with COVID-19 or other communicable disease, must 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.

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 can not 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.

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.

Procedure For Creating Alternative 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 must request a meeting with the SSW Faculty Field Liaison and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (as available) to create a unique 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 plan for continuing the practicum in the case of a Stay at Home Order /Return to Remote Work Only/Short-Term Disruption.
3. Those plans 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.
 - a. 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.

Given the unique nature of a variety of field agencies, learning activities, and client systems, it is impossible to list all activities a student may be able to complete in this policy. General suggestions are given below. Students and their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor should use the 9 social work competencies as guidance while creating activities.

3. Plans 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 [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 others can only see your face- all visible confidential data should be 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)

Alternate Learning Activities

Examples of alternative field learning activities are listed below. Field Instructor/Site Supervisor (s) may come up with other activities, in addition to the ones listed on this page. Students and Field Instructor/Site Supervisor should use the 9 social work competencies as guidance while creating activities. A longer curated list of activities by competency is available upon request from the SWW.

- **Supervision:** Weekly supervision using Zoom or other teleconferencing applications.
- **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.
- **Trainings for Agency:** develop trainings that will benefit the agency (e.g., self-care, ethics, etc.)
- **Groups/Workshops for Clients:** develop curriculum for future implementation with clients (e.g., life skills, grief, trauma, domestic violence, etc.)

- **Written Materials for Clients or Community:** develop handouts/flyers/brochures, resource guides (e.g., explain voting rights, informed consent policies, etc.)
- **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.)
- **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.)
- **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.)
- **Grants:** research potential grant opportunities and/or prepare aspects of the grant writing.
- **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.
- **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 Fall 2020 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.*