

University of Maine School of Social Work
POLICY FOR REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION OF FIELD PRACTICUM HOURS
DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC
(Fall 2021 & Spring 22)

Preamble

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 students directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council of Social Work Education announced a statement clarifying accreditation standards required for programs as well as minimum field hour requirements for students as a result of the COVID - 19 pandemic. This statement has been updated throughout the pandemic. The most recent version can be found here:

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

It is important to note, here at the University of Maine, we are maintaining the previously required number of hours for all students in field practicum 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 field practicum hourly accrual: 400 hours total for BSWs; and 900 hours total for MSWs.

Any student having difficulty meeting those required hours must reach out to their Field Instructor/Site Supervisor, their SSW Field Faculty Liaison as outlined in **PROTOCOL FOR FIELD PRACTICUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (Fall 2021)** to support the successful completion of the practicum and the semester. We will consider exceptions on a case by case basis; waivers may be approved 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 field practicum hours, some states do. We do not want to put licensure at risk for those that may want to practice in other states.

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 practicum hours, we are working to balance ethical professional practice, optimal learning and the health and safety of students, clients, faculty and the community.

However, if students cannot meet their original field practicum 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 field practicum hourly accrual, they may request to WAIVE no more than 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 practicum in order to request a waiver.

This option for reduced hours is only applicable to students whose **total** field completion dates occur by May 31, 2022, as per CSWE's accreditation statement. MSW Specialization Year Field placement courses that started prior to May 31, 2022 but will not end until after that date will also be eligible.

MSW Generalist Year Students: If students are unable to complete their full hourly accrual, they may request to take an incomplete. Students must contact their Faculty Liaison in advance to request the incomplete and make arrangements to finish all required field hours before the start of the next semester. This option for incomplete is in accordance with the CSWE accreditation statement.

Procedure

1. To request a waiver, students must provide a written request form to their Faculty Liaison and the Field Team. Here is the link to the request form: <https://forms.gle/44cgyvtuAL2T4CFW9>. Students must include the following information:
 - How many hours completed to-date
 - How many hours requesting being waived
 - A brief discussion of why the student is unable to complete the original field practicum hours expectation.
 - A plan of how the student will complete the new remainder of their hours, should the waiver be approved

2. After receiving the request form, the SSW Field Team and the SSW Faculty Field Liaison will review the request and schedule a meeting with the student to discuss the request. The SSW Faculty Field Liaison will gather input from the Field Instructor/Site Supervisor. The Field Instructor/Site Supervisor will be invited to participate, as available.
3. The final decision will be the responsibility of the SSW Field Team and SSW Faculty Field Liaison. A written decision will be provided to the student, a copy forwarded to the student's file, and to the field agency.

***NOTE:** The intention of this policy is to support current students for successful completion of field practicum during the Fall 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.*