

Field FAQs



What is Field Placement?

Field Placement provides students the opportunity to integrate the knowledge, skills, and values learned in the classroom setting with the practical experiences that are provided at the agency. Field Placement is a required course in the foundation and advanced curriculums.

It is important for students to understand that Practicum is a class and should be treated as such. In addition, students need to prepare for the incidental cost(s) of this course. Possible costs outside of tuition include travel (gas and mileage); fingerprinting and background checks; and drug screens, as well as vaccinations and health screenings.

How do I Complete Field Placement?

MSW students complete Field in the spring semester. Both Foundation (1st year practicum) and Concentration (2nd year practicum and advanced standing) complete 500 hours of practicum.

What is the Field Placement Process?

Newly admitted students are required to submit an application for field placement to start the field placement process. More information about this will be provided to you.

The Field Committee consists of faculty, and will meet during the summer and early fall semester to make placement decisions. The Committee will review the student's application and resume and match students with field agencies based on prior work and internship experience, geographic location, field of practice

preference, field placement availability, and in some cases, faculty recommendations.

Many students ask the question: Can I ensure that I get my first placement choice? Slot availability changes rapidly. Slots open and close throughout any given week due to changes in agencies. Foundation students are assigned by field faculty in agencies that provide generalist practice with little input from students. For concentration practicum, the Field Office makes every effort to place students in their preferred setting, but cannot make guarantees because of the rapidly changing human service environment. In both cases the goal is to achieve “a goodness of fit” and with the match.

Once the student is slotted for an agency the agency is sent the student’s application and resume and the student is also sent an e-mail requesting a confirmation interview. **It is the student’s responsibility to set up the confirmation interview within 72 hours of receiving notice.** The confirmation interview does not guarantee a student a practicum slot. The student must interview and be accepted by the agency. Students should treat this process like a job interview. The student has up to two opportunities to secure an agency. If a student denies two agencies or if two agencies deny a student based on compartment issues that student will not be placed in the Field.

Can I complete field placement at my current place of employment?

Students who are currently employed at a human service agency can request an employment-based field placement. This request needs to be submitted well in advance and requires the approval of the Field Coordinators. If approved, this option can **ONLY** be utilized for one academic year (foundation or concentration/advanced standing). The requirements for an Employment-Based MSW Field Placement are: the agency and Field Instructor must be approved by the Field Education Office; the agency must have an MSW who has two years post degree experience to supervise; the MSW Field Instructor cannot be the student’s direct supervisor; the field learning experiences for the student must be drawn from a unit of the agency different from the area where the student functions as an employee; and the student’s employment hours must be clearly defined and separate from the field learning placement hours

Can my placement be arranged for evening and/or weekend hours?

The Field Office cannot guarantee field placements on either weekend or evening hours as most agencies do not have available MSW supervision after 5:00 p.m.

Students need to plan to be available for field placement during normal business hours. If you are working full time you should begin planning well in advance to balance your work, class, and personal commitments.

In addition, students need to be in placement during normal agency business hours (8:00 am -5:00 pm) for a minimum of 16 hours per week during times when their field instructor is also on duty and available to the student. These conditions do not allow students to do the entire placement during evenings or weekends.

Can my field placement be located where I am living?

The primary service area of The University of Alabama School of Social Work is the state of Alabama. The School commits itself to providing education for students located throughout the state and to developing and utilizing qualified field agencies throughout Alabama as field educational sites. The School of Social Work also offers placement options nationally and internationally. Both main campus and distance learning students can explore international placements. In addition, the School has developed a special program that provides field education opportunities with faculty liaison and supervision in the Washington, DC, area for students in the second year of the MSW program. However, to be eligible for national placements (outside of Alabama) the student must be a distance learning student living in the state they are seeking placements. It is expected that main campus students will be placed in the Tuscaloosa/Birmingham area.

All placements are initiated by the field office. Students should not contact agencies to inquire about placement opportunities. Students who reside out of state will be responsible for helping secure field placement locations. The field office will contact out of state students at the appropriate time to begin the process. The Field Office cannot guarantee a practicum placement in the town in which you are living. We will make every effort to place you close to home; however the Field Office priority is making an educationally sound placement. Students need to be prepared to drive at least 60 miles away from their home to accommodate placement.

Please note: Not all states accept interns participating in out of state distance learning programs.

Can a student set up their own practicum?

No. Students should not contact any agency to set up or inquire about practicum placements. The Office of Field Education has a list of approved agencies that meet CSWE requirements. Each year the Field Office makes new site visits and adds new agencies to the existing list.

I need to work while enrolled in School. How much time should I reserve for field work each term?

The MSW first year and second year practicum each require 500 hours for spring semester. Students must be prepared to meet these requirements. The field office will attempt to work with students to complement their work requirements, but, in no way will the educational objectives of the practicum experience be compromised. Students can apply for an extended placement which allows the student to extend their practicum through the summer.

Can I be placed in two different agencies?

MSW first year students will be placed in a one agency for one semester. MSW second year students will be placed in a different agency than their MSW first year or BSW placement, for spring semester.

What agencies offer stipends to students?

While the Field Office strongly encourages agencies to offer stipends, the agencies that do so vary and the decision is entirely up to the agency. Stipend amounts also vary, but are usually quite small. Sometimes agencies offer stipends depending upon the amount of time the student can give to the agency, or to make the placement more attractive to students. Agencies may receive grants that allow the agency to give the student a small amount of funds. There are some specialized grants such as the child welfare grant and the juvenile justice grant that have specific stipulations. Students can discuss stipend availability at their placement interviews or with the Field Office.

Do students need to have a car?

Students are responsible for securing transportation to their field placements regardless of location. As there is limited public transportation in many areas, students must have access to transportation to reach their field placements. It is to the student's advantage to have a personal vehicle. Many of our local communities are small and have few resources for field placements; therefore, not having a personal vehicle will severely limit the field placement options.

Many field placements offer services that are community-based and the majority of fieldwork sites require the use of a vehicle for field work. This means that many field placements require students to have a car to perform field related tasks such as transporting clients, community outreach, home visits, community work, attending meetings, etc. When using a personal vehicle for required educational

training that is authorized by the University, the student's personal automobile liability insurance is considered primary. Agencies are expected to reimburse students for mileage incurred when conducting agency business (not travel between the agency and the student's residence). However, students should inquire about this policy during the interview.

Do students need insurance?

The University of Alabama carries a blanket professional liability insurance policy for students. Coverage is limited to \$1,000,000/\$3,000,000. It is recommended that students also carry an automobile insurance policy if they will be using their car to carry out agency assignments (see above).