



**WKU**<sup>®</sup>

Department of  
**Social Work**

**MSW  
Field Manual  
Fall 2026**

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## **Welcome- Students, Field Instructors (our faculty in the field), and Field Liaisons**

We would like to welcome you to a very meaningful part of social work education. Since its inception, the profession of social work has considered practical experience to be an important part of social work education. In fact, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) deemed field education as the “signature pedagogy” of social work education in 2008.

**Students:** this is an exciting time where you will have the opportunity to practice the skills, knowledge, and values acquired in the classroom. You will have a social worker who meets with you weekly to provide feedback and guidance on your learning experience. Field placement is the beginning of your identification as a professional social worker- something to be proud of!

Field Education is offered concurrently with academic study. Students are matched to a social service agency and complete an internship placement under the guidance and supervision of an experienced professional social worker called a Field Instructor. This vital interaction is designed to reinforce our students’ academic study with real life experience. It permits testing theory in practice settings and provides students with field experience that is vital for academic and professional development. Affiliated social service agencies in several Kentucky communities, and surrounding areas, are utilized for field instruction. These agencies provide our students with a wide range of social service settings for generalist Field Education.

**Field Instructors:** we are INCREDIBLY grateful for your time, knowledge, and commitment to the newest generation of social workers. You are our faculty in the field. Your guidance, mentorship, and modeling of skills are crucial to our student’s development and will have a lifelong impact on the student’s professional social work career. You are a crucial component to ensuring students graduating from our programs are competent, beginning level social workers.

**Field Liaisons:** We are grateful for your dedication and service. Your role is vital in bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world practice, and we could not do this work without your advocacy and mentorship. You serve as key support to both the student and the field instructor, ensuring that the field experience aligns with the program's educational goals and competencies. Your insights help us continue improving our field program to meet the evolving needs of students and agencies. Thank you for your commitment and assistance to shaping the next generation of professional social workers.

As a department, we are committed to providing field instructors with training prior to hosting student interns at their agencies and offering ongoing support throughout the field learning process.

This manual provides policies and procedures to guide all aspects of the field experience. We wish you well in this field placement experience and encourage you to familiarize yourself with, and adhere to, the policies in this manual.

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## Context of Practice

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Although social work education is built upon a common knowledge, values, and skill base, each social work program in the United States is unique, based upon its university affiliation, regional location, population needs, and practice focus. Western Kentucky University's social work program is informed by all of these.

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## Western Kentucky University (WKU)

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WKU is committed to ensuring value in a holistic learning experience through high standards for student achievement and conduct, a strong faculty, technological innovation, personalized attention, broad access, and public accountability for actions and outcomes.

WKU recognizes that its mission continues to evolve in response to regional, national, and global changes, and the need for lifelong learning.

### **Vision**

WKU - A Leading American University with International Reach

### **Mission**

Western Kentucky University (WKU) prepares students of all backgrounds to be productive, engaged, and socially responsible citizen-leaders of a global society. The University provides research, service and lifelong learning opportunities for its students, faculty, and other constituents. WKU enriches the quality of life for those within its reach.

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## College of Health and Human Services

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### **Vision**

To be recognized nationally as a college that offers exemplary programs in Health and Human Services.

### **Mission**

To provide diverse educational opportunities leading to excellence in Health and Human Services for a global community.

### **Core Values**

Accountability, Collaboration, Diversity, Engagement, Excellence, Globalization, Integrity, Lifelong Learning, Professionalism, and Service

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## Department of Social Work

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### **Vision**

WKU Social Work strives to create and utilize evidence to foster optimal well-being, equal human rights, and a just society through valuing human relationships and honoring the diversity each person brings to our classrooms and communities.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Department of Social Work at Western Kentucky University is to provide quality BSW and MSW programs that prepare competent and responsible professionals to work successfully in a global society.

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## MSW Program

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### **Mission**

The mission of the MSW program at WKU is to prepare students for advanced professional social work practice to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse rural population in the community, in Kentucky, and in a global society.

### **MSW Student Handbook**

In addition to this field manual, students also have a Student Handbook for the MSW program. A copy of the Handbook can be found on the WKU MSW program website. The Handbook contains helpful information about the program, including a listing of the program curriculum and sequence of courses, the *NASW Code of Ethics*, and much more.

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## Accreditation

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The MSW program at Western Kentucky University is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. The BSW and MSW programs make up the Department of Social Work located within the College of Health and Human Services. This Department, as a whole, has grown significantly over the past 20 years. Members of our faculty have an extensive range of educational, practice and teaching backgrounds.

Pictures and educational background of all staff and faculty can be found at <https://www.wku.edu/socialwork/staff/index.php>

### **Social Work Core Competencies and Behaviors**

Field education is the “signature pedagogy” of social work education; it is the pivotal transformative experience in progressing from “social work *student*” to “social work *professional*”. The core competencies are the learning outcomes for this course. Upon successful completion of SWRK 560, 561, 660, and 661 (along with evidence drawn from social work coursework), students are expected to demonstrate achievement of the nine core competencies (left hand column below) as evidenced by the associated behaviors. Each

competency will measure in terms of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes.

According to the 2022 Educational Policy and accreditation Standards issued by the CSWE, students completing an MSW Program curriculum should accomplish the following:

**Generalist Year**

Competencies	Expected Behaviors
<p><b>Competency 1:</b> Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics within the profession as appropriate to context;</li> <li>• Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;</li> <li>• Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes;</li> <li>• Use supervision and consultation to guide judgement and behavior.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 2:</b> Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for human rights at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community system levels;</li> <li>• Engage in practice that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 3:</b> Engage Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, community, research, and policy levels;</li> <li>• Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledge them as experts of their own lived experiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 4:</b> Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply research findings to inform and improve practice, policy, and programs;</li> <li>• Identify ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive strategies that address inherent biases for use in quantitative and qualitative research methods to advance the purposes of social work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 5:</b> Engage in Policy Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services;</li> <li>• Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 6:</b> Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply knowledge of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks, to engage with clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to engage in culturally responsive practice with clients and constituencies.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Competency 7:</b> Assess with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as other culturally responsive and interprofessional conceptual frameworks, when assessing clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Demonstrate respect for client self-determination during the assessment process by collaborating with clients and constituencies in developing a mutually agreed-upon plan.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 8:</b> Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with clients and constituencies to critically choose and implement culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals;</li> <li>• Incorporate culturally responsive methods to negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of clients and constituents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 9:</b> Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select and use culturally responsive methods of evaluation of outcomes;</li> <li>• Critically analyze outcomes and apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.</li> </ul>

## Specialized Year

Competency	Expected Behaviors
<p><b>Competency 1:</b> Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics within the profession as appropriate to context;</li> <li>• Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in rural practice situations;</li> <li>• Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication both in rural communities and in practice settings;</li> <li>• Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate advanced practice in rural settings;</li> <li>• Use supervision and consultation to guide judgement and behavior;</li> <li>• Actively participate in professional social work associations/organizations;</li> <li>• Design and manage effective self-care strategies to reduce the likelihood of compassion fatigue and burnout.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 2:</b> Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in practice that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice and critically analyze the intersections in rural contexts;</li> <li>• Advocate for human rights at the individual, family, group, organizational, and community system levels.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 3:</b> Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of ADEI in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels in rural settings;</li> <li>• Demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, community, research, and policy levels;</li> <li>• Demonstrate cultural humility by applying critical reflection, self-awareness, and self-regulation to manage the influence of bias, power, privilege, and values in working with clients and constituencies, acknowledge them as experts of their own lived experiences;</li> <li>• Analyze the holistic and systemic nature of problems in rural settings taking care to attend the special factors of rurality: such as diverse cultural backgrounds dual relationships, inadequate transportation, extreme poverty, difficult access to health care, and disenfranchisement from political processes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 4:</b> Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use practice experience and theoretical underpinning of anti-racist and anti-oppressive evidence-based practice models to inform scientific inquiry and research;</li> <li>• Integrate and adapt research evidence to inform and improve ADEI practice, policy, and service delivery in rural settings;</li> <li>• Identify ethical, culturally informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive strategies that address inherent biases for use in quantitative and qualitative research methods to advance the purposes of social work.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Competency 5:</b> Engage in Policy Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use social justice, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lenses to assess how social welfare policies affect the delivery of and access to social services in rural areas;</li> <li>• Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice in rural settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 6:</b> Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply knowledge of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as interprofessional conceptual frameworks, to engage with clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Ensure informed consent while using empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills at an advanced level to effectively engage in culturally responsive practice in rural setting;</li> <li>• Utilize the most appropriate anti-racist and anti-oppressive engagement strategy according to each practice context.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 7:</b> Assess with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect and organize client-driven data, and skillfully apply critical thinking to interpret information from rural clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Apply theories of human behavior and person-in-environment, as well as other culturally responsive and interprofessional conceptual frameworks, when assessing clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Demonstrate respect for client self-determination during the assessment process by collaborating with clients and constituencies in developing a mutually agreed-upon plan based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenge in rural areas;</li> <li>• Modify appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of rural clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Consider aspects intrinsic in rural settings impacting assessment such as connections with church communities, neighbors, extended family, fictive kin, and other informal resources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Competency 8:</b> Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage with clients and constituencies to critically choose and implement culturally responsive, evidence-informed interventions to achieve client and constituency goals;</li> <li>• Incorporate culturally responsive methods to negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of clients and constituents;</li> <li>• Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and culturally responsive and inter-professional conceptual frameworks in interventions with rural clients and constituencies;</li> <li>• Use inter-professional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes in rural settings;</li> <li>• Provide leadership in program development, administration, and evaluation; clinical and organizational supervision; research development and utilization; and policy creation, reform, and implementation;</li> <li>• Facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually developed goals.</li> </ul>

**Competency 9:**  
Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

- Select and use culturally responsive methods of evaluation of outcomes in rural settings;
- Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other culturally responsive inter-professional conceptual frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes for rural clients and constituencies;
- Critically analyze outcomes and apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in rural contexts.

The goals of the field practicum are:

- To provide MSW students the opportunity to consciously reflect upon and critically integrate course knowledge, skills, values, and cognitive and affective processes learned in earlier social work courses with real field experiences;
- To provide students with support and opportunities necessary to demonstrate their integration and application of the nine core competencies identified by the Council on Social Work Education.

Through practice of social work tasks identified in the students' learning plans, along with discussions, activities, and assignments, students will review concepts and practice integrative thinking/doing in their emerging professional work. For students to adequately demonstrate competence in each of the core areas, there will be an emphasis in practice classes on students:

- Understanding each competency area and the discrete behaviors that together provide evidence of competent practice;
- Employing critical thinking and social work professionalism to approach field tasks
- Exploring what they do not know (or do not consider), and designing activities that will assist them in gaining required knowledge, skills, and values
- Reflecting upon and evaluating their practice in relation to the NASW Code of Ethics
- Learning to skillfully and graciously give and receive feedback related to performance as advanced level professional social workers
- Becoming consultants and coaches for each other by asking questions that support critical thinking and principled actions in the field

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### **Approval Process for Field Placement Agencies**

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The Field Director approves Instructors and Agency Task Supervisors for field placement. All placements, including work-site placements, must be in approved agencies and under the supervision of approved field instructors. All agencies, including worksite placement agencies, must go through the field procedure for approval prior to enrollment of students in field placement at that agency. The agency approval process for new agencies is as follows:

- An authorized agency representative completes and submits an Agency Application/Field Instructor Agreement
- The Field Director decides eligibility as a field site.
- Approved agencies will be encouraged to provide position descriptions.

- Approval is ongoing with the Field Director and instructors sharing the mutual responsibility for updating the Affiliation Agreement/Agency Application/Information Sheet as agency circumstances or personnel change.
- In the case an agency is denied approval, appeals may be made in writing to the MSW Field Director. In consultation with the Department Head and the MSW Program Director, a final decision of eligibility will be rendered.

**During the above process, an agency is approved according to the following process:**

- The Field Director or designee vets the prospective agency/staff.
- The Field Agency Application/Information Sheet indicates that one or more programs offer suitable placement opportunities for students. These opportunities are congruent with the goals and outcomes of the program.
- A MSW holding a degree from an accredited program and who has two years of experience and follows (in compliance with) state licensure laws is available to serve as a field instructor. (Note: In some instances, an agency board member or community partner, a community practitioner with a relationship with the agency, a contracted community practitioner, or a faculty member may serve as a field instructor if this is agreeable to all concerned parties. In this case, the agency and Field Director agrees on an agency-based task supervisor.
- Following (in compliance with) the state Social Work Licensure Board (may be licensed or exempt).
- Willing to submit a current vita or resume and copies of their transcript and/or social work license.
- Willingness to attend WKU’s field instructor trainings and orientation sessions.
- The agency and field instructor indicate willingness to participate actively in the student’s learning process and to abide by the agency policies and the policies contained in this Field Manual.

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**WKU MSW Field Student Placement Procedures**

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The field process not only follows an orderly progression, but it also attempts to seek an appropriate “fit” between students and their field environments.

Once the placement has been approved and finalized, the director will send an Approval Letter giving further directions.

**Steps to Begin the Field Placement Process**

The student is required (NOT OPTIONAL, it is MANDATORY) to attend an MSW practicum orientation and interview with the field director. Students must schedule an interview time to discuss field placement with the Field Director. In the MSW practicum orientation, the Field Director will provide students with an overview of what to expect in field practicum and what steps to take to secure a field placement. Students can ask questions, receive guidance, and begin to carefully plan what it will take to have a meaningful and successful field practicum experience.

After orientation students will be required to schedule an MSW practicum interview with the field director to assess their professional development, skills, and placement choices. These interviews are normally scheduled via zoom but not limited to only virtual settings.

#### Required Documents to Complete before the MSW Practicum Interview

- Field Application
- Signed HIPPA Statement
- Signed Field Manual Statement
- Cover Letter
- Resume

#### Steps to Begin the Field Placement Process

1. Attend Field Orientation and Interview/Meet with Field Director- The student is required to attend an orientation and interview with the field director. Students must schedule an interview time to discuss field placement with the Field Director.

2. Submit Field Application- When students are notified by the field director, they will need to complete a Field Application form and submit it immediately. All applications should be submitted six weeks prior to the beginning of the semester (at the latest), or placement may be delayed or denied.

○ The director will notify the student about possible placement options available and the contact information, so he/she can set up an interview for placement. It is the student's responsibility to actively pursue the placement, and report back to the field director if a problem arises. If the student fails to set up an interview, as requested by the field director, placement for the semester can be denied. Once the interview has occurred, the student will report back to the Field Director about how the interview went and if they were offered/accepted a placement at that agency. If the student does not wish to accept the placement (with good reason, as determined by the Field Director), another interview will be arranged. Failure to accept a placement without good reason, or failure to accept the second placement offered, may be grounds for termination from field.

3. Required Documentation – Student must complete the field application, upload a professional resume, cover letter, and at least 2 – 3 organizations/agencies of interest for placement (also found in application). ALL documentation requested will be entered into a software system.

4. Field Interviews – Students must interview with the field team committee (including MSW Field Director) within the MSW Social Work program. Students will receive approval to connect with an agency of interest to schedule an interview for a potential future internship.

5. Placement Interviews- Students must watch their WKU email. Once the student completes

and returns the field application, the Field Director will email the student using the students WKU email and suggest an agency for the student to contact. Students are welcome to suggest new field settings, however, **STUDENTS CAN NOT TO CONTACT AN AGENCY WITHOUT THE FIELD DIRECTOR'S PERMISSION.**

*Failure to meet these requirements will result in dismissal from field.*

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### **Preparing for the Agency Interview**

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Placements require a preliminary interview. The Field Director will inform the student of the agency placement contact information. The student takes the initiative to schedule the interview. If the contact person cannot be reached, the student finds out when that person will be available and calls back at that time. The student should also leave his/her name, a return number, and the best time to be reached by the contact person. When leaving phone messages, students should also mention that they are WKU social work students and are calling to set up an interview for field placement.

Once the agency contact person is reached, a date and time for the interview is set. Placement interviews should be handled like job interviews, which require appropriate professional attire, behavior, and some background knowledge about the agency.

Before the interview, the student might find it helpful to review the agency's website and check the agency files in the Field Education Office to obtain more information about the agency.

### **The Interview**

During the interview, the student learns about the requirements of the placement and the educational opportunities available at the agency. The interview is a two-way process. Students should have clear goals and learning priorities and be prepared to ask specific questions about learning experiences available, clients served, skills that can be developed, type of setting (structured or unstructured), and methods of supervision, etc. Suggested questions are provided below:

#### **Suggested Interview Questions**

1. What kind of activities and programs does this agency undertake?
2. What activities, tasks, and/or projects will I be able to undertake?
3. What specific skills will I be able to develop at this agency?
4. Does this agency have a particular theoretical approach to intervention?
5. What are the general characteristics of clients and communities served by this agency?
6. What is the approach to and structure of supervision?

7. What amount of interaction does a student have with other students and with permanent staff?
8. What opportunities exist for inter-professional collaboration or cooperation?
9. What types of in-service training or workshops and conferences will be available to me?
10. What kinds of cases and/or projects do you anticipate assigning to me?
11. What kinds of skills do you hope a student will bring to the agency?
12. How much independence and initiative do you expect me to demonstrate?
13. How are students helped to handle issues of diversity regarding age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability on both staff and client levels?
14. What opportunities exist for inter-professional collaboration or cooperation?
15. What types of in-service training or workshops and conferences will be available to me?
16. What kinds of cases and/or projects do you anticipate assigning to me?
17. What kinds of skills do you hope a student will bring to the agency?
18. How much independence and initiative do you expect me to demonstrate?
19. How are students helped to handle issues of diversity regarding age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability on both staff and client levels?

Students should be prepared to answer questions about their background, educational and career goals, and why they might desire that particular placement. At the interview, agency personnel assess the student's level of interest and suitability for the general type of assignments they have in mind. Typically, it is at this point that placement decisions are finalized. However, if there are well-founded reservations about the suitability of the match between the agency and the student, the Field Education Office should be informed at once by the student and/or the Field Instructor.

### **Failure to Place**

If the agency fails/refuses to offer a student an interview or placement based on students' attitude, phone etiquette, appearance, maturity level, emotional state, reputation or performance in the interview (or with other good reason, as determined by the Field Director), another interview will be set up with another agency. If the second agency fails/refuses placement based on the student's performance in the interview (or with other good reason, as determined by the Field Director), this may be grounds for administrative withdrawal from field courses.

### **Timeline for Starting Field Placement**

Students must have a placement and begin earning hours by the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. Students are strongly encouraged to start their placement within the first two weeks of the semester, so they do not fall behind on hours and journal assignments. If a student has not secured a placement and started hours by the 5<sup>th</sup> week of the semester, this is grounds for being dismissed from both field and the co-requisite practice course.

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### Online Pre-Field Assignments

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Pre-field Assignments are mandatory. Students will complete pre-field training, which is a combination of online assignments, quizzes, classroom orientation and agency orientation with the field director. **Online pre-field assignments are not counted as field hours.** The field liaisons will monitor compliance of student's on-line activity. Failure to complete on-line assignments will delay placement and could cause withdrawal within 10 days of start date.

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### Field Hours

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MSW Generalist (first year MSW) students spend a minimum of 400 hours (200 hours each semester). Students in their Specialized year (second year/Advanced Standing) spend a minimum of 500 hours (250 hours each semester) in a social service agency as part of the major degree requirements (excluding pre-field orientation hours). Field hours represent a significant percentage of the student's academic credit hours. This credit reinforces the importance of field instruction as the laboratory of testing ground for social work majors. Pre-field hours will not count as field hours. Students may count 16 hours of training each semester as field hours, if the agency approves/sponsors the training/in-service.

Field hours begin the first week of class (each semester) and end the week before finals. Students cannot begin early or stop early. Finals week may be used to finish up hours and final evaluations, if needed. First year students in the traditional two-year program may begin placement within the first four weeks of the beginning of the first semester.

Field hours must extend over the entire semester. The only exception to this rule is "mandatory orientation" of the agency that is only scheduled prior to placement date. Exceptions (military duty, maternity, etc.) must be approved by the Field Director.

Students may complete no more than 20 hours during the school breaks, between semesters. These hours may be counted in semester two. Students must talk with their Field Liaison and seek permission to accrue 20 hours between the semesters. Access to field supervision during this time is required. This is done to provide continuity of services to the clients.

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### Expectations for the Student

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1. The student is expected to meet the course requirements for each level of field instruction and be in good standing.

Prerequisites for SWRK 560: Admission to the MSW program and Co-requisite: SWRK 520.

Prerequisites for SWRK 561: Successful completion of SWRK 520 and 560 and Co-requisite:

SWRK 522.

Prerequisites for SWRK 660: Admission to the MSW Advanced program or successful completion of all required 500 level MSW courses.

Prerequisites for SWRK 661: Successful completion of SWRK 660 and 620. Co-requisite: SWRK 622.

***Only students meeting this criterion are eligible to be in field courses and complete field placement hours.***

2. The student will adhere to the *NASW Code of Ethics*. The student is expected to read the *Code of Ethics* prior to their first week of field placement. Failure to follow these ethical standards may result in termination from the field practicum and/or the SW Program.
3. Any student enrolled in the university assumes an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with the WKU Student Code of Conduct. Professionalism is a mandatory requirement for students in field.
4. The student will engage in cultural competence practice, as defined by the *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*.
5. It is mandatory that the students maintain the confidentiality of agency records.
6. The student will not alter the program requirements or any other condition of his or her field placement without the permission of the Field Director, Field Liaison, and the Field Instructor.
7. The student will adhere to the Agency's schedule of holidays, closings, etc. Students must consult with their field instructor to negotiate time off during these breaks in the academic calendar. The student will adhere to the Agency's schedule of orientation and in-service training as a requirement of his/her practicum.
8. If a student misses field time, for any reason, the student must make up the time.
9. The students must keep a record of the number of hours they work in the field and use the Timesheet found in a software system to submit their hours by the due date set by their Liaison in the field syllabus.
10. The student is expected to retain their original Learning Plan/Evaluation, all journals/assignments, timesheets and other related work products until they have completed the program. The fully completed Learning Plan/Evaluation submitted in a software system by the end of Semester 2 of Field.
11. The student will sign a statement that confirms they have read and understand this Field Policy Manual.

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**Special Requirements for Field Placements**

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## **Criminal Background Check**

A growing number of agencies serving as field sites require students to undergo a criminal background check, fingerprinting, child welfare check, immunizations, as well as other additional requirements. Students desiring to complete placement in these organizations must comply with agency requirements for special screening. Although most agencies cover all or at least some portion of the costs for these special requirements, students will be expected to obtain all required screenings at their own expense, if not covered by the agency. All students must follow the agency's guidelines on Universal Precautions. All students must follow Center for Disease Control and state guidelines regarding public health matters.

*It is the responsibility of the student to be forthcoming regarding any issues that may affect his or her ability to perform effectively with clients or with other related field assignments.*

Having a criminal history including, but not limited to: a misdemeanor or felony related to alcohol/drugs (PI, DUI), threats/assault/restraining orders, destruction of property/theft (including shoplifting or bad checks), domestic violence or child abuse/neglect charges does not necessarily mean you will be rejected for a field placement, however, if a student does not disclose his/her criminal background on the application, and later a criminal history is discovered, this will be grounds for dismissal from the program.

Students with a criminal background may be requested to schedule a meeting (phone call or face to face) with the Field Director to have a better understanding of field placement options and limitations.

## **Obtaining Professional Liability Insurance**

All students must have verification of professional liability insurance prior to entering field, NO EXCEPTIONS. Insurance forms are available from Field Website. Students who hold professional liability insurance through their employers should verify coverage with their carriers and the Field Director. The Field Director will require a written statement from the carrier that coverage will extend to practicum activities. The Department requires a minimum individual coverage of \$1,000,000 occurrence/\$5,000,000 aggregate. Failure to apply for coverage early in the application process (30 days prior to the first week of class, in any semester) may cause a delay in the start date of field placement.

Students will NOT be allowed to enter field placement and/or have client contact without proof of professional liability insurance. There will be no exceptions. Failure to qualify for or obtain liability coverage by the beginning date of practicum will result in a student not being allowed to begin field placement and possibly being withdrawn from the field courses. If students do not provide proof of coverage within 10 days of the start date of the placement, he/she will be withdrawn from field course and from the corresponding practice course.

## **Driver's License and Transporting Clients**

Students must have reliable transportation to and from field placement. If students will be driving as part of their field experience, they must possess a valid driver's license as well as auto insurance. If the agency requests, and if the student chooses to transport clients, as part of the field duties, an insurance rider on your personal policy is highly recommended. WKU has no responsibility for any transportation issues.

## **Home Visits**

Home visits may be a routine responsibility of a student's field placement or indicated in a variety of situations.

## **Safety**

Student safety is a priority for the Field Office and the Department of Social Work. If a student has any safety concerns regarding their field agency, the concerns must be reported to the Faculty Field Liaison and to the Field Director as soon as possible.

Agencies will be expected to take reasonable measures to ensure the safety of each student. At a minimum, the same security and safety procedures provided to the staff must be provided to the students. In certain circumstances students may need additional support and security.

Students are encouraged to have their own personal cell phone, if they are interning in an agency where they do not have access to a telephone when working with clients.

All personal safety incidents, (e.g., an accident during placement which may have resulted in student injury or a case of sexual harassment or stalking) must be reported immediately to the Field Director by either the student, Field Instructor or Faculty Field Liaison.

WKU maintains a record of student accidents/incidents and most agencies will require an incident report to be completed as well. The Field Director will provide the student with a WKU incident report to be completed and filed in the student file and sent on to the WKU Environmental Health and Safety office for record.

## **Emergencies**

In the case of an emergency off campus (e.g. crime, injury, fire, etc.) call #911 and be prepared to report:

- a) the nature of the emergency;
- b) the exact location of the emergency;
- c) your name and callback phone number in case further information is needed.

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## Employment

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Many students in the program are employed either on a part-time or full-time basis. Those students have the option to negotiate with their employers the required time necessary to be available for their practicum during the usual business hours of the field agency. Evening and weekend placements are difficult to find and are not guaranteed. (*See Worksite Placements*).

### **Worksite Field Placements**

When possible, students may complete their practicum at the place of their current employer, (worksite placement) and/or receive payment for their internship (paid internship). These requests will be supported when appropriate as a means of meeting the program's mission to prepare social workers to meet the needs within the WKU service area and beyond. To maintain quality education, such placements are carefully developed and supervised. The student, employment supervisor, agency administration, Field Instructor, and Field Director sign the Worksite Placement and Paid Internship form. Policies have been developed that are designed to ensure that students learning follow the field employment standards as outlined in CSWE- EPAS. "If permitted, student assignments and employee tasks may qualify as field hours when directly linked to the nine social work competencies (and any additional competencies added by the program) and level of practice (generalist or specialized). Field education supervision may be provided by the same supervisor if field education supervision is distinct from employment supervision and the supervisor meets the requirements of Accreditation Standard 3.3.6". It should be noted that the program does not guarantee approval of worksite placement.

- The agency must be able to meet the educational outcomes of the program and requirements of CSWE. This includes the availability of a Field Instructor who holds a MSW (for MSW students) degree from an accredited program and two years of post MSW practice experience. Students in clinical settings for placements must have an LCSW as a field instructor for supervision. WKU includes the additional criterion of compliance with state licensure laws.
- The Field Instructor **MUST** be willing to provide one hour of supervision **WEEKLY**, distinct from employment supervision as documented on the student's weekly timesheets.
- The student must initiate the completion of and gather all signatures for the Worksite Placement and Paid Internship form.
- The Field Director will sign the completed Worksite Placement and Paid Internship form if the placement is approved.
- Once a worksite placement/paid internship is approved the student will document employment task and assignments directly linked to the nine social work competencies in their learning plan each semester.
- Weekly practicum hours including supervision will be documented weekly on the student's timesheet. A student is prohibited from completing all their

required hours prior to the end of the semester, (the week before finals), unless they have extenuating circumstances allowing such. All extenuating circumstances must be approved by the Field Director and supported by the Field Liaison and Field Instructor.

- The student's employment supervisor can serve as his/her field instructor as long as he/she has the required MSW credentials to serve in that role. Field instructors are expected to distinguish the distinct differences between field education supervision and employment supervision time. These two CANNOT overlap. WKU faculty or contractual community MSWs may act as external field instructors. The same faculty member may not serve as the student's field liaison and field instructor. If a suitable arrangement cannot be reached, the student must be placed elsewhere.

One of the **disadvantages of a worksite placement** is the fact that field placement will be dependent on the student's employment status. If student quit or lose his/her job for any reason, it will jeopardize field placement, which in turn can jeopardize completion of the MSW program.

### **Conflict of Interest**

To ensure each student an objective-learning environment, including a sound evaluation of student performance in the field setting, students are expected to immediately notify the Field Director if a conflict exists. The Field Director can then assess the appropriateness of the placement.

***Examples of conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:***

- Student placement at agency directly working with or being supervised by a relative
- Student or his/her immediate family member receives services at the placement agency
- Students (Traditional) required to have 2 Field Placements in the Social Work Program CANNOT have the SAME field instructor for both years of field.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides protection from discrimination for individuals on the basis of disability. The ADA extends civil rights protection for people with disabilities to employment in the public and private sectors, transportation, public accommodations, services provided by state and local government, and telecommunications services. Besides physical access, the ADA mandates program access, which includes electronic media and web pages.

***If you require special accommodations, you must provide the Field Director with documentation from the WKU Student Accessibility Resource Center (phone number 270-745-5004) explaining the nature of the required accommodations prior to the placement process.***

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## Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and Title IX Statement of Compliance

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Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to equal opportunity in its educational programs and employment. The University is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer, and does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, marital status, age, uniform service, veteran status, pregnancy, childbirth or related conditions, or physical or mental disability. On request, WKU will provide reasonable accommodations, including auxiliary aids and services, necessary to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in all services, programs, activities, and employment.

The University has published policies and procedures for investigating and/or addressing discrimination or harassment in its educational programs and/or employment. If you believe you have experienced discrimination or harassment in such programs, activities, or employment, policies and procedures are included on the following website: <http://www.wku.edu/policies/> (WKU Policies), in addition to the WKU Student Handbook, and Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. These publications, including information about University procedures, are available on the University's website ([www.wku.edu](http://www.wku.edu)), at:

WKU Policies: <https://www.wku.edu/policies/>

WKU Student Handbook: <http://www.wku.edu/handbook/>

WKU Graduate Catalog: <http://catalog.wku.edu/graduate>

The following person has been designated to serve as the University's Institutional Equity Investigator:

Mr. Rodney Stewart, CIG  
Investigator  
Institutional Equity  
Western Kentucky University  
Wetherby Administration Building (across from Potter Hall), Suite 317  
1906 College Heights Blvd. #11009  
Bowling Green, KY 42101  
Phone: (270) 745-4515

The following person has been designated to serve as the University's Title IX Coordinator:

Ms. Ena Demir  
Executive Director and Title IX Coordinator  
Office of Institutional Equity

Wetherby Administration Building (across from Potter Hall), Suite 317  
1906 College Heights Blvd. #11001  
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1001  
ena.demir@wku.edu  
(270) 745-6867

### **Sexual Harassment**

Western Kentucky University has a Title IX policy that seeks to guarantee each student a learning environment free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is unacceptable conduct and will not be condoned in any form at the University or at a practicum site.

If a student feels he/she is being sexually harassed in their field placement, the student should notify their Field Instructor, Faculty Field Liaison, and the Field Director as soon as possible.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

The abuse of drugs and alcohol by a field student is incompatible with the goals of the Social Work Program. Those in need of assistance in dealing with such problems are encouraged to seek the confidential services of the Counseling and Testing Center, located in Potter Hall (phone number 270-745-3159) or the Student Health Center, located in the WKU Health Services building (phone number 270-745-2273). Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol will be grounds for termination of a student from the program. Substance abuse of any kind will impair a student's judgment and the ability to work effectively with clients in the field practicum setting.

### **Drug Screens and Other Assessments**

Field students may be asked to provide drug screens/assessments (of any type) as a part of the admission/continuation of field (at any time), by the program director or the field agency. Students refusing to provide requested assessments/test results; or testing positive must immediately notify the Field Director. Failure to do so will result in termination from the program.

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## **Responsibilities Once in Field Placement**

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### **Learning Plan**

- Students must submit a Learning Plan within four weeks of the beginning of their field placement. Since faculty want students to have the best practice experience possible, some standardized learning tasks have been developed to enhance learning in the field. Students can make these tasks specific to their agency setting and focus. These tasks are designed to help students gain practice in the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes embedded in the CSWE competency areas.

- Students are expected to develop one or more tasks, to add to this list, based on their specific agency situation and learning needs. These additional tasks must be reviewed and approved by the Field Instructor and Field Liaison. If the student fails to complete the Plan within four weeks of the beginning of their placement, termination from field may be initiated.
- The student will complete and submit the Learning Plan (using the software system) to the Field Instructor and Field Liaison for approval/signatures. The digital form will be used for the student's evaluations at the midterms and final evaluations each semester. It is the student's responsibility to obtain all needed signatures and ensure all documentation is updated. The department will have the learning plan documented in the software system used and all students will have access to those documents, if needed for the future. At the end of the year, it is the Field Liaison's responsibility to ensure that the document is complete (with ALL completed evaluation scores) in the software system.
- At the conclusion of the second semester of field, it is strongly encouraged that students download a copy of the final evaluation for their documentation records.

Remember the Individual Learning Plans are to encompass both semesters, so tasks and timeframes may vary from one semester to another.

### **Assignments- Field Journals**

All field assignments are specified in the syllabi for each semester.

Journals are essential in assisting the faculty field liaison in guiding student learning experiences to maximize the value of field placement. Journals are the major vehicle for communicating to the faculty liaison the full range of issues, both positive and negative, occurring in the field experience and form the basis for discussion and planning for student/faculty conferences. All competency areas will be covered by a journal during the two-semester field placement. The term client is used in generalist terms and pertains to practice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Journal postings should be submitted in a timely manner. The field liaison will provide information to help guide appropriate discussion, emphasizing critical thinking and mutual support for professional learning and growth through respectful questioning and consultation.

Journals will be graded using a rubric provided by the field liaison. Students must pass all journal assignments with at least a score of 12/20 to show competency in each area.

### **Documentation of Completed Hours**

At the end of each semester when the final evaluation is done, the liaison will sign it. This also

serves as the Documentation of Completed Hours. Hours must be completed prior to liaison signature. The liaison will review the weekly timesheets to track the total required hours completed. This is the official documentation that all required field hours have been completed.

### **Professional Practice, Ethical Conduct, and Field Performance Student**

Students are expected to demonstrate professional, ethical, and respectful behavior in the classroom, field education settings, university interactions, agency-related activities, and all environments connected to their development as professional social workers. Students are expected to practice in accordance with the expectations outlined in the MSW Student Handbook, the WKU Student Code of Conduct, agency policies and procedures, and the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. As part of the program requirements, students acknowledge that they have read, understand, and are expected to abide by the NASW Code of Ethics and the professional standards of the social work profession.

The NASW Code of Ethics serves as a guiding framework for identifying professional conduct and performance expectations. Professional concerns may arise when student behaviors interfere with professional competence, ethical practice, client wellbeing, agency functioning, the learning environment, or the reputation and responsibilities of the social work profession. The MSW Program recognizes that professional development is a formative and developmental process. When concerns arise, the program is committed to addressing them in a manner that emphasizes student support, remediation, professional growth, accountability, and due process whenever appropriate.

Behaviors of concern may be documented through a Professional Concerns Form (Appendix F) and referred for a Student Professional Concerns Review. Depending on the nature, severity, frequency, and pattern of the behavior, outcomes may include supportive interventions, remediation planning, probation, suspension from field placement, referral to university resources, or dismissal from the program. Student responsiveness to feedback, corrective action, and professional growth will be considered throughout the review process.

The following categories of behavior may warrant review and possible dismissal from the program:

- 1. *Professional Practice and Ethical Conduct***

Any violation of the NASW Code of Ethics, professional standards, agency policies, or program expectations may be grounds for review. Determining whether a violation is sufficiently serious to warrant probation or dismissal should be based on the nature of the behavior, the surrounding circumstances, the impact on clients or others, and the degree to which the behavior reflects a pattern of professional misconduct. Examples may include, but are not limited to, breaches of confidentiality, dishonesty, boundary violations, falsification of records or documentation, unethical communication, discriminatory conduct, or failure to uphold professional responsibilities.

- 2. *Mental Health, Substance Use, or Other Impairment Affecting Professional Performance***

The MSW Program recognizes that students may experience mental health concerns, substance

use concerns, or other personal challenges during their educational experience. The presence of a mental health condition or disability alone does not constitute grounds for dismissal. Of concern is whether behaviors or symptoms significantly impair the student's ability to perform competently, ethically, safely, and professionally in classroom or field settings. Consideration will be given to the student's engagement in supportive services, treatment, reasonable accommodations, remediation efforts, and responsiveness to intervention. In rare situations, continued impairment that prevents competent and professional performance may warrant probation, interruption of field placement, or dismissal from the program.

**3. *Illegal Activity***

Violation of the law, whether occurring within or outside a professional social work role, may be considered serious behavior that impacts professional suitability and future practice. Certain criminal charges or convictions may affect eligibility for field placement, employment, or social work licensure. Concerns related to illegal activity will be reviewed individually with consideration given to the nature and severity of the behavior, the relationship to professional social work values and ethics, evidence of rehabilitation or accountability, and the extent to which the behavior may compromise future professional conduct or client safety.

**4. *Field Placement Conduct and Professional Behavior***

Field education is recognized as the signature pedagogy of social work education and requires students to demonstrate professional conduct consistent with the values and ethics of the profession. This category covers behavior demonstrated within field education settings, including interactions with clients, field instructors, agency staff, peers, community partners, and other professionals. Concerns may include, but are not limited to, inappropriate or unprofessional communication, failure to follow supervision or agency procedures, disruptive workplace behavior, breaches of confidentiality, dishonesty in documentation or reporting, repeated unpreparedness, boundary violations, failure to respond appropriately to feedback, or behaviors that negatively impact clients, agency operations, workplace relationships, or the learning environment. Because classroom instructors and program faculty may not directly observe behaviors occurring in field settings, information provided by field instructors, task supervisors, agency representatives, and affiliated professionals may be considered as part of a Professional Concerns Review. The severity, frequency, and pattern of the behavior, as well as the student's responsiveness to feedback, remediation, and corrective action, will be considered in determining appropriate outcomes.

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**Professional Identity Development**

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***Coaching Sessions***

Coaching sessions are structured, collaborative meetings between the Field Liaison and student designed to support professional growth, learning integration, and successful field placement experiences. These sessions provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their practice experiences and discuss challenges and successes. The purpose of coaching sessions is to create a supportive learning environment that promotes student success, enhances professional competence, and facilitates continuous growth throughout the field education experience.

Through coaching sessions, Field Liaisons offer guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback while fostering student self-awareness, professional identity development, ethical decision-making, and competency attainment. Sessions may address topics such as professional behavior, communication, practice skills, and strategies for navigating complex situations within the field setting. These sessions are developmental rather than evaluative and are intended to empower students to identify strengths, address areas for growth, and achieve their learning goals.

A total of six (6) one-hour coaching sessions are offered each academic year. While attendance is STRONGLY RECOMMENDED for all students, participation voluntary. However, the Field Director reserves the right to require student attendance when additional support, professional development, or intervention is deemed necessary.

### *Trainings*

Students may be required to complete mandatory trainings prior to the start of their field placement or during the academic year. Completion of these trainings is a condition of participation in field education and may be required by the Social Work Field Program, the placement agency, or both.

Failure to attend or complete required trainings may result in a delay in the start of the field placement. In such cases, students may be required to postpone their field placement and resume field education during a subsequent academic year.

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### **Notification of Student Concerns in Field**

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**Step 1:** Field Instructors, Task Supervisors, Faculty Field Liaisons or any others involved in the student's field placement who have concerns regarding a student's field performance, professional conduct, an ethical violation/dilemma, emotional state, or academic performance should express their concern first with the student, faculty, Field Liaison and/or the student's advisor via email for documentation purposes.

**Step 2:** Upon submission of the email, a Performance Support Plan Form will be developed to identify areas of concern, outline expectations for improvement, create a timeline for monitoring progress. The plan will also specify potential outcomes based on the student's successful completion of the identified objectives and expectations.

**Step 3:** If the concern is field related, and cannot be resolved by the Liaison, the Liaison will submit the concern in writing (via email or use of the Professional Concerns form) to the Field Director.

**Step 4:** The Field Director will contact the student. The student may be asked to meet with the Field Director and/or Advisor regarding the concern.

**Step 5:** If a successful resolution cannot be reached, either for practical or for policy-related reasons, the Field Director will notify the Program Director to bring the issue before the MSW faculty at a program or called emergency meeting. The student will be invited to attend the meeting to discuss the concern.

**Step 6:** The student's advisor or the Program Director will notify the student in writing of the MSW faculty program meeting resolution.

**Step 7:** If the student does not agree with the resolution, a written appeal must be sent by the student to the Program Director within 5 working days.

This policy is written only to assist with communication and in no way intends to circumvent the termination process, or the student grievance policy. At any point, the student is free to follow the grievance policy set forth in the Student Handbook. Students are expected to adhere to this order of communication.

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### **Placement Reassignment/Termination Procedures**

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There are numerous reasons that arise which may cause a need for reassignment or termination after the student is in placement. Each situation will be explored, and the outcome will depend upon the nature of the situation.

- Many situations may be resolved by the Field Director.
- Some situations may need to be resolved by engaging the Program Director and/or MSW Program faculty. The MSW Program faculty will be convened as needed. The student may request to appear before the MSW Program faculty to discuss the situation personally.
- The Field or Program Director will inform the student in writing of the committee's decision. If the student does not concur with the decision of the committee, the student can appeal as specified in the Student Handbook and the Graduate School Catalog.

When a placement is disrupted/changed, potential transferability of hours accrued will be determined by the Field Director and/or MSW Program Faculty. However, the student's new agency must agree to accept a student for a reduced number of hours for the transfer of hours to be finalized. The student will be notified in writing of the outcome.

#### **Agency Issues/No Fault of Student**

If the agency is unable to continue to offer educational opportunities and the student is doing acceptable work, the Field Director will consult with Field Liaison and make a reassignment as

quickly as possible. In this case, all accrued hours will be transferable, pending agreement by the student's new placement agency.

### **Student Request**

If a student is requesting a change in placement, the request must be made in writing to the Field Director and only after serious consideration and consultation with their Field Liaison and Instructor. Any reassignment is contingent on the availability of an appropriate substitute placement and determination of compelling reason for the change, by the Field Director. If the request is without a compelling reason, the Field Director will deny the request, or request consultation during a MSW Program meeting. If the reason is compelling, the Field Director will find another placement for the student and inform interested parties. The student should understand that alternate placement options might be severely limited.

Transferability of hours is at the discretion of the Field Director and/or MSW Program faculty decision and the student's new placement agency.

### **Involuntary Agency Termination/Reassignment Process**

If the student is involuntarily terminated from an agency, the agency Field Instructor is requested to state in writing the reasons for the termination after meeting with the Faculty Field Liaison. The agency's decision to terminate a student is final.

**Step 1:** If the student wishes to request reassignment to a new field placement and remain enrolled in the program, the student must submit in written statement addressing the concerns identified by the terminating agency, within (5) business days of receiving notification of termination.

**Step 2:** The Field Director will present the student's written response to the MSW program faculty for review and a vote to determine whether continuation in field education is approved or denied. A majority vote from the faculty will determine the outcome. In the event of a tie, the Field Director will cast the deciding vote. Possible outcomes include reassignment or termination from field and/or consequently from the MSW Program. Policies governing termination from the Program may be found in the Student Handbook.

**Step 3:** The student has (10) business days following the written notification in which to appeal to the School Chair. See university wide grievance policy.

If a student is involuntarily terminated a second time, during his/her social work program, the student will be terminated from Field without convening MSW Program faculty.

If a student is involuntarily terminated from an agency and is given the option to remain in the

Program, hours previously completed are not counted toward the fulfillment of required hours and total hours for that semester must be completed after the date of reassignment. In practical terms, this means that a student who cannot complete the total number of hours in the weeks remaining in the semester, must wait until the following academic year to enroll in practicum and the corresponding practice course.

### **WKU Administrative Removal of a Student from Field**

In rare instances, a student may be removed from a particular practicum site or from the field internship program. Reasons for such an administrative decision are congruent with the Student Handbook. If such an action is contemplated, the student will meet with her/his Field Liaison who will notify the Field Director and Program Director, who will convene a MSW Faculty meeting. After careful deliberation, the committee will reach a decision regarding possible removal of the student from the field course. If the student does not concur with the committee's decision, she/he may follow the grievance procedures outlined in the Student Handbook. Removal from field necessarily results in removal from the concurrent practice class and/or possibly, from the Program.

### **Program Termination**

Students are subject to termination from the Program if removed from field courses for any reason; and students are subject to termination or suspension from the Program during their participation in field under the same terms and conditions as outlined in the Student Handbook.

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### **Field Practicum Evaluation/Grading**

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Students will be graded on their completion of field requirements and their professional skill development based on meeting the Competencies and Field Journals. PASS/FAIL grades will be assigned by Field Liaisons after consultation with agency field instructors and students.

Students must demonstrate competency in each of the nine competency areas. Each competency area has specific behaviors that students are expected to successfully demonstrate to be competent in that particular standard. Instructions for rating the Learning Plan Evaluation can be found on the front page of the Learning Plan.

Students must pass field and score at least a 12/20 on each journal (based on the rubric in the syllabus), to advance to semester two. Students must pass field in semester two and score at least a 12/20 on each journal (based on the rubric in the syllabus) to graduate, or progress to the next field class.

Planning for the final evaluation should begin at the start of the semester. All parties—the Field Instructor, student, and Field Liaison—should review the core competencies and behaviors to

ensure that the criteria are met over the course of the semester. Each Liaison visit/contact will include a discussion of how the core competencies and behaviors are being met and to brainstorm ways of meeting any that seem to be problematic. Any such difficulties should be addressed well in advance of the final evaluation.

Field Liaisons may use the University supported video conferencing software for students in the online MSW Program or for students placed in agencies more than 75 miles from the student's assigned campus (Bowling Green, Glasgow, Elizabethtown, or Owensboro campus) to conduct field visits with students and Field Instructors rather than driving to the agency. Check with the Field Office if there are questions as the University supported software may change. It is important to use the University software for FERPA purposes as Skype and other programs are not private.

Students are evaluated at midterm and at the conclusion of each semester based on their performance on the behavioral indicators within each of the core competencies. Field Instructors and students are asked to complete evaluations using a copy of the Individual Learning Plan independently, compare results, and reach an agreed-upon conclusion prior to the Field Liaison's visit. Spaces for commentary are provided at the end of the form. These should address strengths, areas for continued learning, and any other areas deemed noteworthy by any of the three parties. Again, it is anticipated that any concerns will have been addressed well in advance of the final evaluation.

Individual Liaisons have the option of requesting that a copy of the evaluation be submitted 48 hours (about 2 days) in advance of the final visit. Liaisons are responsible for officially assigning final grades for field students.

Any student who believes that he/she has been unfairly graded must follow the University appeal procedures outlined in the Student Handbook and Graduate School Catalog.

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### **Evaluation of Field Process**

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Upon completion of the final semester of field, students, Field Instructors, and Field Liaisons will be asked to complete an evaluation of the field process and experience. This survey will be completed online. The Field Office will send a link for all parties to complete the evaluation. The information will be utilized by the Field Office to evaluate the overall placement experience including the field office and seminar processes as well as the appropriateness of agencies and Field Instructors to ensure quality placements for students.

### **Sharing Evaluation Results**

A summary of the learning plan evaluation (competency scores) information will be shared in aggregate on the WKU BSW Program Webpage. All results will be compiled in summary format to protect student confidentiality.

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## **Agency University Relationships and Responsibilities**

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The Agency and University share the responsibility for instructing field students in a partnership relationship, each performing different functions in this relationship. Multiple individuals work together to make this partnership successful, including field instructors, the Field Director and faculty field liaisons.

### **Expectations for the Agency**

- The agency's director should be committed to the agency's participation in professional social work education.
- An employee of the agency should be designated to serve as the contact person to work with the school.
- The agency and the school will enter into an agreement regarding the mutual expectations for affiliation prior to a student being accepted for placement.
- The agency will provide reasonable physical facilities necessary to accommodate the student and also provide a reasonable orientation to the agency.
- The agency should consistently provide the variety, quality and quantity of learning experiences appropriate for the level of field education: Generalist year (1<sup>st</sup> year MSW) and/or MSW Specialized year. This includes providing opportunities for students to have face-to-face client contact.
- The agency will be expected to ensure the availability of case material and work activities for instructional use by students. This material would be subject to the guidelines of confidentiality.
- The agency should reimburse students for agency-related travel expenses from the agency to home visits, etc.
- The agency should provide the opportunity for students to attend staff meetings and participate in other collaborative and professional exchanges.
- In the case of working with a faith-based agency, the agency may provide the opportunity for students to attend and participate in spiritually oriented activities; however, they must respect the student's decision as to whether or not to participate.
- The agency should allow its field instructor's adequate time for student supervision and other meetings pertinent to this role.

- Agencies should have formal safety policies and procedures. These procedures should be discussed with students at the beginning of placement and completed as part of the orientation checklist the student turns in with their Initial Field Information sheet to their Field Liaison.

Field Instructor Orientation and other trainings provided:

- WKU offers Multimedia as well as face to face training/information to instructors
- Free CEU credit offerings during each semester
- Orientation and Field Instructor training each year

## **Contracts**

Each agency will be required to sign a CHHS Affiliation Agreement or an approved agency contract prior to student placement. The Memorandum of Agreement between the agency and the Social Work Department is signed by the Associate Dean of the College of Health and Human Services, the Social Work Department Head and an appropriate agency administrator/supervisor.

## **Orientation to the Agency**

Orientation to the specific agency and its clients is the responsibility of the agency field instructor. It is generally recognized that some form of planned orientation is beneficial to students. Essential to the orientation process is agency-based HIPAA training, if applicable, worker safety and emergency procedures for the agency. Faculty field liaisons, in conjunction with agency field instructors and students, are responsible for planning and implementing an agency orientation program that will enable the students to become familiar with agency policies, procedures and the student role. During the first two weeks of placement, the student will complete the "Initial Placement Information" form and submit this to the Field Liaison. This form includes geographical information as well as a list of orientation elements. Liaisons will review the orientation checklist to ensure proper orientation.

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## **Roles of Field Staff**

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### **Role of the Agency Field Instructor**

Field Instructors, employed by community agencies, are selected by the agency on the basis of their practice competence and their positive approach to a generalist social work education. The social work students' whole practicum experience revolves around the Field Instructor. *The agency field instructor must schedule at least one hour of formal supervisory conference with the individual student on a weekly basis.*

Although they do not have University appointments, the contributions they (and their agencies) make to Social Work education are incalculable. Their responsibilities include:

1. Arranging for student orientation at the beginning of field placement
2. Consultation with the student and liaison in developing a Learning Plan
3. Providing weekly supervision and evaluation sessions for the student. If at any time the student's level of performance is questionable, informing the student and faculty liaison;
4. Providing instruction in agency recording requirements and other agency procedures and policies; Providing a stimulus for students to be involved in department planning, relevant community and professional events, and suggesting appropriate reading materials;
5. Providing practice experiences, assisting students in goal attainment and providing feedback;
6. Assisting in evaluation, both oral and written, at the midterm and final meetings as well as engaging in final evaluation sessions with the students; and
7. Attending training seminars conducted by the Department of Social Work when able.

### **Role of the Task Supervisor**

In recognition of the fact that the students' experience in an agency can be enhanced by interaction with non-BSW/MSW social service professionals, some agency field instructors may assign some supervisory responsibilities to a task supervisor. The task supervisor is selected by the agency field instructor based on the preceptor's experience or expertise in a particular area of service delivery. The preceptor may be from professional disciplines other than social work such as marriage and family counseling, psychology, occupational and recreational therapy, etc.

*The involvement of a task supervisor is at the discretion of the agency field instructor, but a task supervisor does NOT replace the agency field instructor nor reduce or diminish any of the agency field instructor's responsibilities as listed above.*

Both the task supervisor and agency field instructor are encouraged to develop clear avenues of communication as it relates to the students' progress through the practicum. **To promote effective collaboration, the Task Supervisor is expected to participate in at least one (1) and no more than two (2) supervision meetings per month with the student and/or Agency Field Instructor.**

Task Supervisors are also welcome to participate in contact visits with the student, Agency Field Instructor, and Field Liaison to discuss the student's progress, learning goals, and ongoing development

within the placement. Ultimately, the agency field instructor remains solely responsible for the student's field training experience and holds vicarious liability for the student's field performance.

### **Role of the External Field Instructor**

Occasionally there is an excellent educational opportunity with an agency; however, that agency may not have an MSW staff person available as a Field Instructor to supervise the student. In this circumstance, an external Field Instructor may be obtained to provide the MSW educational supervision for the student, while the agency employs a Task Supervisor who provides the student with daily assignments, tasks and supervision. The external Field Instructor will have a BSW or MSW degree and a minimum of two years post graduate social work experience.

**The external Field Instructor is expected to work closely with the Task Supervisor in obtaining input regarding the student's practice tasks and performance. The external Field Instructor will fulfill all the expectations required of Field Instructors of the Social Work Department.**

### **Role of the Field Liaison**

The field liaison serves as a bridge between the practice community and the school, and to insure a valuable field learning experience for the student. The liaison is responsible for:

1. Communicating and interpreting (if needed) the curriculum to the individual field instructor;
2. Where necessary, training field instructors in supervisory techniques;
3. Assuring that the educational focus of the placement is maintained;
4. Assuring that time expectations and practice assignments are appropriate, and, where not appropriate assisting the field instructor in developing additional assignments/tasks;
5. Participating in the development of student field outcomes and tasks, and monitoring/revising educational learning plan as needed;
6. Evaluating student progress at mid-term and end of each semester;
7. Assessing the communication between the student and field instructor, and, where problematic facilitating problem solving;
8. Responding to problems raised by student, field instructor or identified by the liaison;
9. Assessing the experience provided by the agency and transmitting that information to the Fieldwork Director via formal or informal mechanisms;

10. Reviewing and monitoring the student's pre field assignments, journals and recordings;
11. Bringing to the attention of Field Director and Social Work faculty any student who is experiencing difficulty in field;
12. Monitoring the final evaluations and grading student field assignments.

These roles are implemented through telephone, e-mail, school, and agency visit contacts.

- MSW Field Liaisons are expected to have a minimum of three contacts with the agency field instructor during each semester (two face-to-face agency visits and a phone conference call). University supported video conferencing software may be utilized to conduct face to face visits for students in the online MSW Program or for students placed in agencies more than 75 miles from the student's assigned campus (Bowling Green, Glasgow, Elizabethtown, or Owensboro campus) to conduct field visits with students and Field Instructors rather than driving to the agency. The third contact may be a conference call with the field instructor and student at the beginning of the second semester or at midterm of the first semester of field. The student should be present for at least part of the discussion with the field instructor.
  - Check with the Field Office if there are questions as the University supported software may change. It is important to use the University software for FERPA purposes as Skype and other programs are not private.

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### **Guidance for Field Liaisons**

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#### **Agency Visits/Contacts**

The purpose of the visit/contact is to determine how the student is doing, if the student is being assigned appropriate tasks, if there is a positive relationship between the student and field instructor, or to identify potential problems.

Prior to visits, tell students that you are scheduling visits. Tell them the purpose and process of the visit, and their role in the visit. Make sure that their Field Timesheets are available at the agency on the day of the visit. You will want to ask students to tell you if there are any specific issues that should be raised in the agency visit.

Preferably, the visit should be made on a day when the student is at the agency. Since one purpose of the visit is to assess student/field instructor communication and problem solving, and to learn about the student's perception of their learning experience, it is important for the student to be at least part of the visit. When both are present for part of the interview you will be able to assist in the problem-solving process if any have developed.

Time should be set aside to meet with the field instructor alone, and with the student and field instructor together.

### **First Contact**

- Visit or call field instructor, introduce self, and give her/him your telephone, fax, and e-mail information.
- Make sure that the field instructor has received the syllabus and Field Manual and has reviewed the Field Webpage.
- Determine how the student is settling in.
- Review field instructor's plans for student orientation.
- Review the potential initial assignments.
- Discuss, assist and approve the Learning Plan.
- Discuss any potential problems raised by field instructor.
- Arrange for the first agency visit.
- Discuss with student his/her perception of the initial weeks.

Discuss with the Field Director if an agency appears to be having a major problem or seems to be unable to fulfill our expectations.

### **Topics for meeting with field instructor alone**

- Relationship building – between you as the field liaison and the field instructor
- Discuss how the student is settling in –ask how the student is beginning to integrate theoretical concepts. If this has not happened in supervisory conferences, ask the field instructor to begin to ask such questions of the student.
- Questions the field instructor has about the curriculum, Field Manual, expectations, assignments.
- Questions the field instructor has about supervision techniques.
- Have field instructor describe tasks/responsibilities assigned to the student and their purpose.
- Have the field instructor describe the process of a typical supervisory session.
- Discuss necessary changes, particularly if supervisory sessions are not being conducted on a regular basis for at least one hour a week.
- Discuss specific strengths and concerns about the student's work.
- Discuss process for completing evaluation form (joint meeting between student and field instructor).

### **Topics for meeting with field instructor and student**

- Review the Learning Plan – discuss how students are making progress.
- Discuss plans for coverage during breaks.
- Have the student present to you and the field instructor what her/his assignments

are, what specific competencies and behaviors the student is working on and what the student is learning.

- Discuss problematic issues raised by either the student or the field instructor, or items that are of concern to you.
- Develop plans for dealing with the problems (call back the agency and check with the student one to two weeks later to determine progress on the changes).
- Discuss future learning needs and additional assignments for the remainder of the semester or for next semester.

### **Topics for meeting with student at the agency**

- Review and discuss records/reports written by students.
- Discuss any issues raised by the site visit of concern to you or the student.
- Advise Field Director if problems are identified (using Professional Concerns form).
- Present students with significant problems to the social work faculty.

### **Second Agency Contact**

The second contact should be scheduled about halfway through the semester. This is a time to assess where the student is in the learning process and make any needed revisions to the learning contract. This is a time to focus on midterm evaluation.

Topics for this contact may be:

- Discuss changes, new assignments, and new learning plans.
- Discuss level of skill developed.
- Discuss problems identified and plans for resolving.
- Review Records and Timesheets.

Make sure that you have a current list of student placements, agency names, telephone addresses, and field instructor names. If the field instructors change, or if you have names of contact persons or field instructors that do not match the list, please let Field Director know of the change. If the student has a task supervisor, please let the Field Director know of those changes also.

### **Agency Visit- Final Evaluation**

This visit should occur within three weeks of finals week. During this visit the final evaluation for the semester will be completed. Each competency and the accompanying behaviors on the learning plan will be reviewed to determine behaviors demonstrated and if the competencies have been met. During the first semester, you may have NA for a few behaviors, but for the second semester it is not acceptable to have ANY non-applicable behaviors for the competencies, since all must be met by the end of the year.

- Complete Student Evaluation (first semester) and provide a copy for the Field Liaison. Students are to keep the original Learning Plan Evaluation until the end of semester two.

- Complete Student Evaluation (second semester) and submit original to Field Office, to be placed in the student master file. Students are encouraged to keep a copy of their Learning Plan Evaluation.
- At the end of the second semester of field, students, Field Instructors, and Field Liaisons are to complete an online survey of the field experience. This survey will be emailed to all parties by the Field Office.
- Advise Field Director if problems are identified (using Professional Concerns form).
- Present students with significant problems to the social work faculty.

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## Important Field Documents

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[Student Application for Field Placement](#)

[Field Instructor Application](#)

[Role of a Field Instructor Form](#)

[Role of a Task Supervisor Form](#)

[Agency Application and Informational Sheet](#)

[Example Timesheets](#)

[Worksite Placement Request Form](#)

[MSW Generalist Year Learning Plan and Evaluation](#)

[MSW Specialized Year Learning Plan and Evaluation](#)

Students, Task Supervisors, Field Instructors, Field Liaison, and agencies interested in becoming an approved agency can find more information about field (including a copy of the manual) on our website at <http://www.wku.edu/socialwork/field/>