



**Department of Social  
Work**

**MSW Program**

**Practicum Education Manual**

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### **Westfield State University Department of Social Work MSW Practicum Education Manual**

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# **I: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

## **Introduction to the Practicum Education Manual and Social Work Practicum Education**

Social Work Practicum Education is a partnership involving the Social Work Department, Practicum Education Program, Social Work Faculty and staff, Community Partners, Practicum Supervisors, and graduate social work students. This Practicum Manual provides all partners with an overview of the following:

- Foundation and Advanced MSW practicum placements
- Application and assignment to a practicum placement
- Selection of internship sites and Practicum Supervisors
- Mutual responsibilities of the Social Work Department, Practicum Education Program, Community Partners, Practicum Supervisors, Faculty Practicum Liaisons, and students
- Key policies and procedures related to practicum education

It is essential that students, Practicum Supervisors, and faculty practicum liaisons carefully review the material in this Practicum Education Manual. Students are expected to retain and use this Practicum Manual before and throughout their time in the Westfield State University (WSU) Social Work Program. This manual is provided as a reference guide and is not intended to replace contact with Practicum Education Program staff. Students, Practicum Supervisors, and faculty practicum liaisons are encouraged to contact the Practicum Education Program with any questions or concerns about information contained in this Practicum Manual or any other aspect of the practicum education experience.

## **Use of this Manual in conjunction with the MSW Program Manual**

Students are advised to use this Practicum Manual in conjunction with the MSW Program Manual that is available on the program website. Information about the entire curriculum, faculty, and program-wide policies are detailed in the Program Manual and, while referenced, are not repeated in this Practicum Manual.

## **Competency-Based Education in the Practicum**

Social Work education is competency-based. Social work competence is the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being.

The framework for competency-based education includes a focus on the assessment of the student's ability to demonstrate the competencies rather than only on the assessment of inputs (such as coursework and resources). Social work practice competence consists of nine interrelated competencies, with specific observable behaviors for each competency. These competencies are reflected in the Social Work Program's Mission Statement and Overarching Program Goals. The competencies for both MSW Foundation and MSW Advanced years can be found on the Program's website and in the MSW Program Manual.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and our social work program recognize a holistic view of competence; that is, the demonstration of competence is informed by the holistic dimensions of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that include the social worker's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment regarding unique practice situations.

### **Overview of The MSW Practicum Internship - Social Work's Signature Pedagogy**

The practicum internship is recognized as social work's "signature pedagogy" by the Council on Social Work Education, a national organization that is the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States. A "pedagogy" is a form of educational practice and a "signature pedagogy" is a profession's central and unique way of teaching and learning about how to become a knowledgeable and skilled member of that profession. The practicum internship is considered to be Social Work's signature pedagogy because it offers students the opportunity to practice and demonstrate competency of the skills learned in the classroom through supervised practice with actual clients in a social service environment; to understand the relevance of conceptual frameworks, theories, and empirical research findings for addressing real-life problems; to examine and apply their understanding of social work values and ethics; to develop a professional identity as a social worker; and to observe and learn from experienced social workers who are currently practicing in their careers.

The profession of Social Work views learning in the classroom and learning in the practicum as interrelated, complementary, and equally important ways of developing social work knowledge, values, and skills. Classroom and internship-based experiences are not seen as separate learning environments, but as mutually enhancing learning opportunities. Social work students are viewed as active learners who take what they learn in the classroom into the practicum internship and bring what they learn in the practicum internship back into the classroom. Students acquire research-based, conceptual, and theoretical knowledge about practice and policy issues relevant to their practicum experiences in both the classroom and in the internship placement setting. At the same time, they develop an understanding of and capacity to apply the practice-based knowledge and experience of both their classroom instructors and their agency instructors and co-workers. Drawing upon their experiences in the practicum, students learn from each other, as well as from the instructor in the classroom.

For this reason, social work classroom and practicum experiences share the same overall learning goal, which is to work toward demonstrated competency for entry-level professional practice in Social Work as identified in the nine social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

### **The Foundation and Advanced Social Work Practicum Internship**

The Master's in Social Work Program at Westfield State University includes several options for the overall timeframe to complete the program curriculum (*please refer to the Program Manual for detailed descriptions of each option*). Generally, students enrolled in the Traditional Options (two years full-time or three/four years part-time) complete both a Foundation and Advanced Practicum. Students enrolled in the Advanced Standing Options (one year full-time or two years part-time) generally complete only an Advanced Practicum.

Each Practicum is completed over the course of two semesters and includes both an internship placement and a weekly integrative practicum seminar. The Foundation Practicum requires a minimum of 400 hours (approximately 16 hours per week) and the Advanced Practicum requires a minimum of 500 hours (approximately 20 hours per week), for a total of at least 900 hours of practicum internship experience in approved settings under the supervision of professional social workers.

### **The Foundation Practicum Courses: SOCW 0561 and SOCW 0562**

The foundation year social work practicum is generally completed over the course of both semesters of the first year of the MSW program for full-time students. Part-time students complete the Foundation Year Practicum over both semesters of their second year in the program.

The focus of the foundation year practicum is reflected in the first of the Social Work Program's two overarching goals: *The program prepares graduates who will have mastered the knowledge, values, and skills of the social work professional generalist practice core.*

According to the Council on Social Work Education:

Generalist practice is grounded in the liberal arts and the person and environment construct. To promote human and social well-being, generalist practitioners use a range of prevention and intervention methods in their practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. The generalist practitioner identifies with the social work profession and applies ethical principles and critical thinking in practice. Generalist practitioners incorporate diversity in their practice and advocate for human rights and social and economic justice. They recognize, support, and build on the strengths and resiliency of all human beings. They engage in research-informed practice and are proactive in responding to the impact of context on professional practice.

(From the 2015 Education Policy and Accreditations Standards, available at [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx))

Concurrent with the hours each week spent in the internship setting, foundation year practicum students also participate in a weekly synchronous integrative seminar throughout both semesters of the foundation year. This seminar provides students with an opportunity to discuss and compare practicum placement experiences, learn from, and teach each other, examine personal values and ethical issues in social work practice, and further integrate knowledge and experience through structured assignments, activities, and group processes, which may also be connected to their assignments in other courses. The overall goal of the practicum seminars is to help students make connections between their academic work in social work and their field experiences and to work toward demonstrated competency for entry-level generalist practice in the field of Social Work as identified in the nine MSW Foundation social work competencies and specific observable behaviors. In addition, by bringing students together from many different fieldwork settings, the seminars offer an opportunity to broaden each student's exposure to the field of social work through the sharing of experiences and ideas in the seminar sessions. Specific goals and assignments for each seminar and each semester of practicum will be provided in the course syllabus and may be adapted throughout the course to meet the specific needs of the group.

Students register for the practicum course, including the seminar, during the regular registration timeframe. However, students need to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Field Education Program to provide the best possible learning environment for all seminar participants. The location of each student's placement, students' social work experience, and the overall needs of each seminar group are considered in making these assignments. Students remain in the same seminar section for both the fall and spring semesters.

### **The Advanced Practicum Courses: SOCW 0661 and SOCW 0662**

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The advanced-year social work practicum is generally completed over the course of both semesters in the second year of the MSW program for full-time students. Part-time students complete the advanced year practicum during their third or fourth year while advanced standing students complete this practicum during their one year in the program (part-time advanced standing students complete this practicum in the second year).

The focus of the advanced year practicum is reflected in the second of the Social Work Program's two overarching goals: *The program prepares graduates who will have advanced knowledge, values, and skills for clinical social work practice.*

According to the Council on Social Work Education:

Advanced practitioners refine and advance the quality of social work practice and that of the larger social work profession. They synthesize and apply a broad range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary knowledge and skills. In areas of specialization, advanced practitioners assess, intervene, and evaluate to promote human and social well-being. To do so they suit each action to the circumstances at hand, using the discrimination learned through experience and self-improvement. Advanced practice incorporates all the core competencies augmented by knowledge and practice behaviors specific to a concentration.

(From the 2015 Education Policy and Accreditations Standards, available at [https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS\\_Web\\_FINAL.pdf.aspx](https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditation-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx))

In addition to the hours each week spent in the field setting, advanced-year students also participate in a weekly asynchronous integrative seminar throughout both semesters of the advanced year. Specific goals and assignments for each seminar and each semester of placement will be provided in the course syllabus and may be adapted throughout the course to meet the specific needs of the group.

This advanced social work practicum requires students to continue to apply and integrate the knowledge and skills gained in their previous practicum and academic courses in human behavior, social work practice, policy, research, and elective topics. Direct practice, Practicum Supervisors, process recordings, seminar discussions, integrative journals, and case consultations are utilized as learning tools and require students to directly apply these concepts in their social work practice. The goal of this course is to increase the ability of students to apply theory to practice in the development

of their social work knowledge, attitude, values, and skills at an advanced level and to demonstrate competency for entry-level clinical practice in Social Work as identified in the nine MSW advanced social work competencies and specific observable behaviors.

Students register for the practicum course, including the seminar, during the regular registration timeframe. However, it is important for students to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Practicum Education Program to provide the best possible learning environment for all seminar participants. The location of each student's placement, students' social work experience, and the overall needs of each seminar group are considered in making these assignments. Students remain in the same seminar section for both the fall and spring semesters.

## **II. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PRACTICUM EDUCATION PLACEMENT PROCESS**

### **Preparing for the Practicum Placement Application Process**

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Students should begin to think about the kinds of practicum experiences that would be appropriate to their learning needs and interests concurrently with their application and acceptance into the MSW program. Students are encouraged to discuss their post-master's career interests with practicum education staff, who may be able to assist them in learning more about services and opportunities in specific practice areas. It is generally recommended that students complete their social work practicum placements in two different areas of practice to develop a wider range of knowledge. Because of the Program's single concentration in clinical practice, students are expected to complete an Advanced Practicum in a setting where they have opportunities to directly apply clinical concepts and skills.

Regardless of the client populations served and services provided, foundation year placements must offer the student a *generalist practice* experience and advanced year placements must offer the student an *advanced practice experience*, as defined by the Social Work Program and the Council on Social Work Education.

Also, concurrently with application and acceptance into the program, students must evaluate and plan for the time commitment of completing a practicum placement. Advance discussion with employers, family, and other support systems to consider adjustments to daytime schedules and responsibilities is crucial in facilitating a successful practicum placement experience. Specific information regarding the requirements for practicum placement hours is provided in both Section I (Overview of the MSW Practicum Placement) and Section V (Responsibilities of the Student) of this manual.

### **Applying for the Social Work Practicum Internship**

Active students receive an email notification during the second half of the Fall Semester with specific instructions to begin the practicum application process for the following academic year. Practicum Application Forms are available on the WSU Social Work Department Practicum Education website following the opening of the practicum application process. Students who are not actively completing



coursework at the time the application process begins (i.e., on leave of absence and planning to return the following academic year) may not receive an email notification and are individually responsible for contacting the Practicum Education Program directly to initiate the practicum application process before the identified due date. Newly accepted full-time students are required to complete the practicum application within ten days of acceptance to the MSW Program.

Applications require information in several areas, including student interests, previous experience, availability, interests in specific client populations, practice areas, specific practicum sites, previous criminal history, immunizations, etc. Students must submit their completed practicum application forms by the due date indicated in the instructions. Each application must also include an updated resume that may be provided to potential practicum sites. Students applying for an employment-based internship must also complete a secondary application related to the specifics of the internship. It is essential that students understand that locating and establishing new practicum sites can take several weeks and, in some cases, may take months or not be possible at all. Students who return incomplete or late practicum applications and/or do not actively collaborate with practicum education staff may risk delayed entrance into their internship and subsequent delay in completing practicum requirements.

In determining a student's readiness for practicum placement, practicum education staff will review the student's practicum application form(s), the information provided by the student during the MSW Program application process, the student's academic record thus far in the program and University and may additionally interview the student by phone and/or in person as well as request information from WSU faculty that have experience with the student. The quality of the student's participation in the practicum placement and interview process is also essential in evaluating a student's readiness for the practicum education component of the program.

While meeting the student's educational needs and program requirements are necessarily the first criteria for practicum placement, student preferences are also considered. The practicum application provides an opportunity for students to discuss their preferences related to the kind of setting/population, location of the placement, and availability. It is important for students to understand that, while their preferences will be considered to the extent possible and as prioritized by the student on the application, *this does not mean that their preferences can/will be met in their practicum placement assignment.*

Students work in a collaborative process with the Practicum Education Program to determine practicum placements. While students' particular interests and needs are considered to the extent possible, it is important that students understand that the Practicum Education Staff makes final decisions regarding practicum placement assignments, and those decisions are based on many variables. Occasionally students will have an interest in a placement site that our program does not have an affiliation with. This may open an opportunity for the Practicum Education Program staff to explore the feasibility of the potential site to determine if it meets the requirements for a social work practicum placement. In other cases, the lack of affiliation with a particular placement site may be the result of a previous decision made by the Practicum Education Program and not be an option. Students are **not** permitted to initiate contact with a potential practicum placement site without prior discussion and

approval from the Practicum Education Program.

In addition to educational needs, program requirements, and student preferences, there are several external variables that may impact practicum placement options. For example, geographic location is a central variable in the availability of practicum placements. ***For the 2022-2023 academic year, students in the Westfield On grounds Program should expect their practicum placements to be within a 60-mile radius of the WSU Campus, while students in the Online Program should expect to complete practicum placements within Massachusetts.*** ***For the 2023-2024 academic year,*** students in the Online Program, that are in the Advanced full-time and full-time traditional programs should expect to complete their practicum placements within Massachusetts. ***For the 2024–2025 academic year,*** students in the Online Program should expect to complete their practicum internships in Massachusetts. Consideration can be made without **guarantee** to completing an internship within a 50-mile radius of Massachusetts in the following states, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York with the understanding that the student works collaboratively with the practicum department to secure the internship placement and the recruitment of the site happens in a timely fashion (February – May). It is crucial that students understand this **does not** mean that the Practicum Education Program can develop a placement in every location that is within a 60-mile radius of WSU or every location within Massachusetts or outside of the state. Students need to be prepared to travel as it may be expected multiple days per week to complete their practicum placements. While some students complete placements within a short distance from their home, other students will need to commute to access specific kinds of settings that are not available closer to their home or WSU.

*Students are expected to be available to complete all their practicum hours during regular daytime business hours.* **While some evening and weekend hours may be arranged under certain very rare circumstances, there are very few placement sites that offer evening and weekend practicum hours, especially hours with the required level of supervision.** In addition, all students are required to participate in at least some regularly scheduled agency staff and clinical meetings, which are generally held during daytime hours, to gain the full experience of working in a social service environment. It is crucial that students not assume that they will obtain one of the very few evening/weekend placements as these assignments are determined within the same criteria as discussed in Section II of this manual (Applying for the Social Work Practicum Internship) and are typically highly competitive. Students in one of the part-time programs are eligible to apply for a placement that includes evening and/or weekend hours. Students in the full-time program are not eligible for evening/weekend placements. —

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Students who have been accepted into the full-time MSW program are strongly encouraged to evaluate their ability to work full-time in addition to completing their coursework and completing the approximately 16 hours (foundation placement) or 20 hours (advanced placement) of practicum internship weekly. It is not uncommon that students who work full time and/or do not have flexibility in their work hours find it necessary to adjust their hours of employment and/or consider an employment-based practicum placement. Each student must consider his/her unique circumstances and plan accordingly to meet program requirements.

It is also common that the availability of placements changes annually so a particular placement site and/or Practicum Supervisor from a previous year may not be an option in a current year. Some students will need to accept placements that, while they may not fit the student's primary long-term

interests or geographic location preference, do provide substantial and appropriate learning opportunities.

Some organizations only accept foundation or advanced-year students; others have a certain number of placements or have application deadlines. While the above represents the most common external variables, unique variables exist each year and are considered in the practicum placement process. Additional crucial information regarding applying for the practicum internship is discussed under Section V, Responsibilities of the Student.

Students may not, under any circumstances, commit to a practicum placement, including an employment-based practicum placement, without prior approval and assignment of the placement by practicum education staff.

### **Employment-based Practicum Placement**

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Students who are interested in doing their practicum placement at their place of employment will indicate this preference on their application form and complete an *additional* Employment-based Proposal and Contract available on the Social Work Practicum Education website.

Generally, the term “employment-based practicum placement” refers to a situation in which the employer grants the student *release time* to use some of his/her regular employment hours to complete a practicum placement that meets the Social Work Program’s criteria. This type of practicum placement is highly preferable to an “add-on” placement, given the high demands of maintaining employment while also attending graduate classes and completing a 16-20 hour/week placement. However, some sites only offer the student additional, unpaid hours to complete a separate, unpaid (add-on) practicum placement in the organization where they are employed. Students should carefully consider whether to accept a practicum placement in addition to full-time employment within the same organization, particularly if they are in the full-time MSW program and should consider the possibility that it may not be possible to find enough hours in the week to perform adequately as both employees and as students under these circumstances. Regardless of whether the placement is part of the student’s regular hours or “add-on” hours, students and site administrators must agree that placement in an agency where the student is employed requires a new and separate set of responsibilities and different supervision within the agency setting.

### **Employment-based Placement Application Procedures**

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Students who are requesting an employment-based practicum placement must work with the Practicum Education Program and the representative from the employment site to develop an Employment-Based *Practicum Placement Contract*. Students are responsible for completing the employment-based application and obtaining all the required information and signature approvals from their employer. Practicum Education Staff will interview the student (in person or over the telephone) and may conduct a site visit if the agency is not an existing WSU Social Work Program practicum placement, before determining whether the employment-based placement will be approved.

### **Employment-Based Placement Requirements**

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For a practicum placement at the student's place of employment to be approved, the following criteria must be met:

- The student/employee has been employed at the organization for a minimum of 3 months before applying for an employment-based practicum placement.
- The student's place of employment must allow the student/employee to attend required classes.
- The practicum placement must provide a placement experience
  - in an area, program, or service different from the one where the student is currently employed, has been employed, or has had a previous practicum placement.
- that includes new learning opportunities (i.e., the opportunity to work with at least some of the following: different client populations, different intervention methods, different policies and procedures, different community interfaces, different agency staff, etc.).
  - The student's place of employment must provide a Practicum Supervisor who has a Masters's (MSW) degree in Social Work from a CSWE-accredited program and
    - has been employed by the organization for at least one year,
    - has a minimum of two years of post-masters social work experience,
    - is not the student's current employment supervisor,
      - holds the appropriate social work licensure as described in detail in Section III of this manual (Criteria for Selection of Practicum Sites and Practicum Supervisors),
  - The assigned Practicum Supervisors must agree to provide the student with a minimum of one hour/week of individual supervision and must also ensure that the student will receive at least one additional hour/week of group supervision and/or task-oriented supervision.

If the supervisor has not previously supervised social work students, the organization must allow the Practicum Supervisor to participate in a practicum orientation meeting and in Supervision in Practicum Instruction (SIPI) training, as required by the Westfield State University Department of Social Work. SIFI training completed at another accredited MSW program may be accepted if it meets Westfield State University Program requirements for Field Instructor training. Consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring Practicum Supervisor training and competence or waiving the SIPI requirement.

- The practicum agency must establish a formal affiliation agreement with the Westfield State University Department of Social Work.

### **Practicum Placement Stipends**

In certain (and very rare) circumstances, practicum placements may be available that include a stipend. Students may receive a stipend in a practicum placement, as long as the student is considered by the organization to be a student rather than an employee during the practicum placement hours and the internship site otherwise meets all requirements for the WSU Social Work Practicum. The practicum student receiving a stipend must have a reduced and different workload compared to

regular employees doing similar work and must be provided with levels of support and supervision appropriate to and required of their status as students.

### **Readiness for Practicum**

Students admitted to the MSW Program will generally be considered to be ready to enter the practicum at the scheduled time for their chosen sequence of study. Social work faculty recognizes that all students come to the practicum experience with some areas of strength and some areas that need further development. Students are not expected (and should not expect) to be expert practitioners at the beginning, or the end, of their practicum placement experiences. However, it is the responsibility of the Social Work Program and the Practicum Education Program to make sure that students do not enter the practicum until they have achieved the level of knowledge and skill that is required for the protection and promotion of client, agency, and student well-being. For this reason, the Practicum Education Program may, upon occasion, recommend that a student delay entering into the practicum education portion of the MSW Program.

Common examples of reasons for delaying a student's entrance into practicum include the following:

- The need to gain a stronger foundation in general academic knowledge or skills, such as the ability to write clearly and grammatically, to communicate a general level of understanding of social work knowledge, values, and skills as well as cognitive and affective processes that include the student's critical thinking, affective reactions, and exercise of judgment regarding unique practice situations.
- Identified concerns(s) in the student's ability to form relationships, communicate effectively, professionally, and/or promptly, work collaboratively with diverse clients and communities; show respect for the opinions, beliefs, and cultural practices of others; demonstrate self-awareness, self-reflection, appropriate professional boundaries, and self-control; and seek assistance when difficult life circumstances interfere with his/her ability to meet program requirements.
- Two unsuccessful pre-placement interviews because of either (1) the student rejecting the placement(s) or (2) agency feedback demonstrating strong concern in an area(s) related to social work standards and/or any of the areas discussed above.

Delayed placement may also be considered if the student demonstrates patterns of behavior that would be unacceptable in a professional setting, such as numerous unexplained absences from class, a pattern of coming to class late or unprepared, repeatedly turning in unacceptable or late assignments, unprofessional and/or disrespectful communication or behavior, having been observed by a faculty or staff member behaving in a significantly inappropriate way (for example, verbally or physically assaulting a classmate, faculty, or staff or coming to class intoxicated), or demonstrating contempt for or resistance to the accepted values, ethics, and/or practices of the social work profession.

Students who are concerned that they may have personal challenges and/or history that could affect their work with certain clients who have a criminal history, students who may be negatively affected by alcohol and/or other drug use, and students who are experiencing serious mental health

challenges, are strongly encouraged to discuss their situation with the Practicum Education Director, as soon as possible to identify an appropriate course of action and to determine their readiness for practicum.

If a decision is made to delay a student's entry to practicum, the specific reason(s) for the delay in completing an internship as scheduled will be discussed with the student and provided in writing by the Practicum Education Staff. Depending on the specific reasons for the delay, the student may be referred to the MSW Program Director or the MSW Program Committee for consideration of referral to the Academic Review Committee (ARC) for further consideration of the student's status in the program. No further action related to the field placement process will occur after referral to the MSW Program Director or MSW Program Committee.

### **Agency-specific Requirements, Dual Relationships, and Conflicts of Interest**

Most organizations are required to perform national and/or criminal background (CORI), fingerprinting, and/or Sex Offender Registry checks before accepting students for an internship. In addition, Protective Service agencies will check to see if student applicants have histories of involvement with Protective Services. Some organizations may have additional requirements regarding medical clearances, immunizations, drug screens, or fingerprinting before acceptance. The results of any and all of these agency-specific requirements may result in a student not being accepted for a placement. While some organizations absorb the cost of these various requirements, students should be prepared to be responsible for those costs depending on the organization/internship site.

Many placements include requirements for outreach and travel to client homes or other locations and/or may require paying for parking, tolls, etc. In almost all circumstances, students should be prepared to utilize their own transportation and absorb any travel costs.

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss any circumstances that may disqualify them for certain placements with a member of the field education staff so that appropriate placement assignments may be made. Students may not be placed in settings where dual relationships exist (i.e. family members and/or close personal and business associates are currently employed; the student and/or family member is a client at the setting). Students with questions about whether or not a specific situation involves a dual relationship, or a conflict of interest should discuss their specific situation with their assigned field education staff. Also, dual relationships, conflicts of interest, and/or any status change (i.e. CORI, protective services involvement, medical issues) that develop during the course of the practicum placement process must be discussed immediately with the practicum education staff. Status changes that occur during a practicum placement and could affect a student's status within that practicum placement must be immediately discussed with the student's faculty practicum liaison.

### **Interview Process**

When a student has received a potential practicum placement assignment from a practicum education staff, she/he is responsible for contacting the site within two business days to set up an interview, unless directed otherwise. (Some organizations require additional application processes and/or written references before interviewing.) It is also strongly recommended that students review the phone messages they have recorded on cell phones and answering machines and consider, if

necessary and/or recommended by practicum education staff, revising it to accommodate professional communications. If contact may occur through email, students are expected to utilize their WSU email address. If circumstances arise that for some rare reason, it is necessary for a student to utilize a personal email address, the student should also review and, if necessary and/or recommended by practicum education staff, change the personal email addresses to accommodate professional communications.

To prepare for a pre-placement interview, students should attempt to find out as much as possible about the potential organization. Most organizations have websites that often have valuable information about their mission and services. Students should be prepared to answer questions about why they want to be a social worker; why they wish to do their practicum at that particular site; and what skills or experiences (personal strengths, coursework, employment, or volunteer work) they will bring to the practicum; their learning goals, their long-term professional goals, and their availability to complete the placement. Many MSW students are also working professionals and will want to pay close attention to the balance of sharing previous skills/experience with demonstrating the readiness to be a student, and a learner, during the practicum placement.

Under no circumstances should a student discuss alternative practicum placement schedules that have not been previously discussed with practicum education staff before the interview (i.e. requesting evening/weekend/irregular hours if this has not been agreed upon before the interview).

Since the student is also evaluating the organization as a possible practicum placement site, the student should come to the interview prepared to *ask* as well as *answer* questions. Asking thoughtful questions about services and policies will convey to the organization's representatives that the student is prepared and genuinely interested in the placement. Interviews may occur in person, via video conferencing, or by phone. In any case, students should plan to be available for the interview early, in professional attire, and be enthusiastic. Students should not offer unsolicited personal information or answer any personal questions that seem inappropriate. Practicum education staff provides students' résumés to the agency. However, if an interview is in person, **students should take additional copies of their resumes to the interview**. Students should also review the *MSW Program Manual and Practicum Manual* before their interview.

It is strongly recommended that students follow up an interview with a brief note thanking the interviewer for his/her time. **Students are responsible for contacting practicum education staff within two business days after the interview to discuss their impressions, interests, and the status of the interview.** Students who are considering the possibility of not pursuing a placement where they have been interviewed should discuss this with their assigned practicum education staff before any discussion with the practicum site. Depending on the circumstances, practicum education staff may discuss the pros and cons of the placement further with the student before reaching a decision. Practicum education staff will decide how notification to the agency will be made if the ultimate decision is not to pursue the placement. Students who accept (and are accepted by) a practicum site should provide the site representative with contact information for the summer months. Students who do not hear back from the agency representative or are unclear about whether they have been accepted should *call to clarify their status* or contact their assigned practicum education staff for guidance. After both the student and the practicum site have accepted a placement, the student must notify the practicum education staff *within two business days* so that an official letter of confirmation may be sent to all involved parties to formalize the placement. The student may

*not* consider a placement finalized until receiving formal notification from the practicum education office.

If the interview process does not result in a confirmed placement, practicum education staff may require a meeting with the student to explore what transpired, assess the student's strengths and resources, and determine additional steps. Possibilities include the following: the student may be offered feedback from the practicum site regarding apparent readiness for practicum education, asked to role-play interviewing skills, or helped to select other placement possibilities that build more closely on past successful experiences. Both students and field sites have the right to decline a placement. However, students who are considering rejecting a placement are strongly encouraged to first consider the policies, procedures, and educational goals of the program and other alternatives before making a decision.

As discussed above under "Readiness for Practicum", concerns about a student's readiness may occur *at any point in the practicum placement process*, including during pre-placement interviews. Students who have two unsuccessful pre-placement interviews because of either (1) the student rejecting the placement(s) or (2) agency feedback demonstrates strong concern in an area(s) related to social work standards and/or any of the areas discussed above, will be referred to the MSW Program Director or MSW Program Committee for consideration of an ARC referral depending on the circumstance. No further action related to the practicum placement process will occur after this referral.

### **Follow Up After Placement Acceptance**

All students should discuss possible work hours, start dates, and any onboarding requirements with the practicum site representative within the first week after a placement has been formalized. Specific information regarding practicum placement hours and start dates is provided in Section V of this manual (Responsibilities of the Student). Students are expected to call or write the practicum site representative *again* in early to mid-August to confirm their current contact information and the start date of their practicum. While not frequent, placements sometimes change when, for example, a staff person goes on medical leave or accepts another position. If any aspect of the plan becomes unclear or confusing at this or any other point in this process, students should contact the Practicum Education Program immediately for assistance.

## **III: CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF PRACTICUM SITES AND PRACTICUM SUPERVISORS**

### **Selection and Responsibilities of Practicum Placement Sites**

Practicum placement experiences occur in a variety of settings across New England. These include health, education, criminal justice, mental health, and a wide range of other settings where generalist and advanced clinical practice can be learned and applied. Students may work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and governmental and non-governmental entities. Students have the opportunity to work with many diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The Social Work Department at Westfield State University partners with organizations and programs that are in alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics, provides a range of learning opportunities, and



demonstrate commitment to student education by offering the skills, time, and knowledge of their staff to social work students.

Specific criteria used in the selection of agencies are as follows:

- The organization must be interested in, and committed to, professional education and the application of research-based knowledge.
- The organization's policies are consistent with accepted ethical standards for human services and with the pedagogical goals of Westfield State University's Social Work Program.
- The organization accepts students without regard to race, color, creed, national or ethnic origin, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, or veteran's status, except in those special circumstances permitted or mandated by law.
- The organization has clearly defined professional standards for social work services and practices and, if it is not primarily a social work agency, makes clear to the student throughout the placement how social work services are integrated with, and affected by, the work of other professionals within the organization.
- The organization provides Practicum Supervisors who have strong practice skills, can plan and implement structured learning experiences that help students integrate classroom and experiential learning, have demonstrated commitment to their professional development, and have had prior supervisory experience or will have access to experienced supervisors who will assist them in developing their supervisory skills.
- The organization allows the Practicum Supervisors sufficient time to respond to the student's need for direction, including at least one hour per week of uninterrupted face-to-face time for formal supervision, to review and evaluate the student's written work, and to participate in field-related meetings and conferences. As necessary and approved by the Practicum Education Program, video conferencing will also meet the requirement for face-to-face supervision.
- The organization offers the student the opportunity to attend staff and in-service training meetings relevant to their practicum placement.
- The organization provides the student with an opportunity to work with diverse client populations.
- The organization provides adequate safe working space and other resources as needed by the student for the performance of field assignments. If the organization requires that the student conduct professional business using a computer, a computer should be made available to the student for use during the agreed-upon placement hours. Practicum sites may not require students to bring personal computers to the site for use in completing professional business.
- As required by federal, state, and/or local law or ordinance, practicum placement sites, as a whole, should be accessible to students with disabilities. The "as a whole" requirement means that students with disabilities should have the same kinds of educational opportunities.

- including practicum instruction in particular kinds of settings - as students without disabilities. However, it is understood that it is not likely that every placement site will have the capacity to accommodate every student. It may not be feasible, for example, for a site to accommodate students who use wheelchairs because of the site's location and existing architecture, but the same site might accommodate students with visual or hearing impairments. Every effort is made by the WSU Social Work Practicum Education Program to ensure equal access to practicum opportunities.

- The organization and/or Practicum Supervisor must include, as part of the practicum placement orientation and as appropriate throughout the placement, a review of all organization policies, practices, and protocols related to personal safety for staff, students, and clients, including information about any possible dangers associated with field assignments and with specific guidelines for safety and risk management specific to the agency's client populations, methods of intervention (i.e., infection control policies and procedures, approved methods for restraint, etc.), and practice settings (i.e., home visits, travel through high-risk areas, etc.).
- The organization is willing to participate in a mutual evaluation process involving the practicum site, student, and social work program to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the experience for the student as well as the compatibility of the experience with program objectives.
- The organization enters into a formal agreement with the WSU Social Work Program that identifies the responsibilities of both parties. The document, known as an Affiliation Agreement, is signed by the WSU Practicum Education Director and an authorized representative of the organization.

### **Selection and Responsibilities of Practicum Supervisors**

The Practicum Supervisor plays a pivotal role in the development of a student's skills and professional identity. In considering a potential Practicum Supervisor, the Social Work Program at WSU looks in general for demonstrated professional competence, the capacity to consciously explicate the concepts and principles that underlie social work practice, a strong commitment to the values and ethics of Social Work, and a motivation to contribute to the preparation of the next generation of social workers.

Additional, more specific, criteria for and responsibilities of WSU Social Work Program Practicum Supervisor include:

- Practicum Supervisor holds a master's degree in social work from an accredited school of social work and has two years of post-degree social work experience.
  - Massachusetts State Regulations also require that field instructors hold a license to practice social work in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) or Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) or be exempt from such license (*if employed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and exempt or employed out of state*). WSU prefers that the Practicum Supervisor of students in an advanced year placement have a LICSW (*or be eligible for such license or the equivalent in another state*).

- A Practicum Supervisor who does not meet the above criteria may be considered if (1) the Practicum Supervisor can meet a specific student's learning goals, (2) no masters level social work instructor with a CSWE-accredited social work degree and comparable level of skill in the same area of practice is available, and (3) the Practicum Education Director determines that the placement setting meets all other criteria for a practicum placement site. In such cases, the WSU Practicum Education Program will develop an individualized plan to reinforce the social work perspective throughout the placement. At a minimum, the plan will include additional consultation between the Practicum Supervisor and the student's faculty practicum liaison and/or an off-site licensed MSW. The student's faculty practicum liaison will be responsible for coordination, documentation, and evaluation of the plan to ensure educational outcomes.
  
- The WSU Social Work Program expects that field instructors adhere to the highest standards of professional ethics and values as detailed in the NASW Code of Ethics.
  
- Practicum Supervisor demonstrates a commitment to further professional development as a Practicum Supervisor, including:
  - Participation, when possible, in WSU practicum orientations, trainings, and events.
    - New Practicum Supervisors are expected to complete (or provide evidence of having completed) a Seminar in Practicum Instruction (SIPI). Consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring Practicum Supervisor training and competence or waiving the SIPI requirement.
  
- Practicum Supervisors are expected to support the specific educational goals of the MSW Program at Westfield State University, including its commitment to competency-based education, evidence-based practice, and social and economic justice, and to plan and coordinate learning experiences that are consistent with the Social Work Program's requirements and the student's learning objectives.
- The Practicum Supervisor commits to providing continuity of supervision and evaluation throughout the practicum year, including
  - personally providing at least one hour of uninterrupted face-to-face supervision time weekly; As necessary and approved by the Practicum Education Program, video conferencing will also meet the requirement for face-to-face supervision.
  - assurance that a total of at least one additional hour of group and/or task-focused supervision is available to the student every week.
  - communication and collaboration with the student's faculty practicum liaison regarding any concerns, needs, questions, etc.
  - participation in a practicum site visit with the faculty practicum liaison and the student at least once each semester and other times as requested.

- completion of evaluation forms, hours/activity logs, and other reports requested by the Social Work Program on a timely basis.
  - notification to the Practicum Education Director in advance of any staffing changes that may affect the student's supervisory relationships.
- Practicum Supervisor ensures that students are oriented to the agency's facilities, services, populations served, policies, and procedures. Particular attention is given to ensure that students are provided with information about any possible dangers associated with practicum assignments and with guidelines for safety and risk management specific to the agency's client populations, methods of intervention (i.e., infection control procedures, approved methods for restraint, etc.), and practice settings (i.e., home visits, travel through high-risk areas, etc.) and make every effort to ensure students' safety over the course of the practicum placement.

#### **IV: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**

The Social Work Department at Westfield State University is committed to providing high-quality master's in social work education. Specific policies, procedures, and practices that demonstrate this commitment are described in additional detail throughout this manual and/or the MSW Program Manual. As part of the commitment to high-quality MSW education, the Social Work Department provides a Practicum Education Program, managed by the Practicum Education Director, to specifically focus on the practicum education process. The following areas specific to practicum education are included in the Practicum Education Program:

- Regular and ongoing communication and collaboration with existing and potential practicum placement sites to explore and clarify the organization's interests and needs and the Program's expectations and requirements.
- Collaboration with students to identify a practicum placement site that will meet students' educational needs, satisfy the requirements of the Social Work Department, and consider the student's personal and professional goals.
- Guidance and assistance to students in the application and interviewing process with identified practicum placement sites.
- Communication and collaboration with potential practicum sites regarding pertinent and permissible information about student applicants and confirming the status of the application/interview process.
- Coordination and completion of all required documentation to confirm practicum placements.
- Providing a Practicum Education Manual that serves as a guideline and reference for students, Practicum Supervisors, and faculty practicum liaisons.

- Offering a structured orientation for Practicum Supervisors at the beginning of each academic year that includes information about the objectives and requirements of the Social Work Program and the Social Work Practicum Placements; the components, sequencing, and content of the social work curriculum; and strategies for supervising students at the Masters level.
- Offering a face-to-face and/or online Supervision in Practicum Instruction (SIPI) course for Practicum Supervisors who have not completed practicum instructor training and allowing practicum instructors to complete or seek credit for a SIPI course offered by any other accredited MSW Program in New England; (consideration will be given to individual circumstances and/or prior supervisor experience that may warrant either alternative methods of ensuring practicum instructor training and competence or waiving of the SIPI requirement);
- Availability of online resources for practicum instructors, including field syllabi, program handbooks, and related evaluation tools and forms; contact information for and email links to the Practicum Education Director, Program Director, faculty practicum liaisons, and, with their permission, other practicum instructors.
- Availability of no-cost or low-cost Continuing Education Units for Practicum Supervisors by participating in educational programs and events offered by the WSU Social Work Program and/or in conjunction with the New England Practicum Education Consortium (NECON);
- Providing Faculty Practicum Liaisons who carry multiple responsibilities, including the instructor role for the integrative practicum seminar and ongoing collaborative and supportive communication between the student, the practicum site/practicum instructor, and the Practicum Education Program. FPLs should refer to the “Faculty Practicum Liaisons (FPL) – Best Practice and Guidelines” document for specific responsibilities. This document is provided to FPLs at the beginning of each academic year.
- Conducting a weekly synchronous and/or asynchronous Integrative Practicum Seminar for all students in practicum placement and facilitated by the FPL, that
  - utilizes structured assignments, group discussions, process recordings, integrative journals, and case consultations as learning tools and requires students to directly apply these concepts in their social work practice.
  - provides ongoing opportunities for students to compare practicum experiences and discuss concerns, and experiential exercises that will assist students in integrating classroom and experiential knowledge, acquiring, and strengthening skills, exploring personal and professional values and ethics, and presenting and discussing clinical case material in a way that promotes learning and reflection and protects client confidentiality.
- Ensuring that students are provided with ethical guidelines for practice, including detailed information about the protection of client confidentiality and compliance with relevant HIPAA regulations.

- Incorporating classroom and seminar content and discussion of policies, practices, and strategies related to personal safety for students in the practicum, including information about possible dangers associated with specific client populations, methods of intervention, and practice settings, and working collaboratively with practicum sites to ensure student safety in practicum placements.
- Monitoring the quality of the learning experience by regularly soliciting formal and informal evaluations from and about students, field instructors, and faculty practicum liaisons.
- Providing regular means of communication between the Practicum Education Program, Faculty Practicum Liaisons, Social Work Department, and practicum instructors.
- Development, distribution, and maintenance of appropriate practicum-related forms and documents, including any necessary training of students, faculty, and practicum supervisors.

## **V. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT DURING THE PRACTICUM**

The student, with the support of the faculty practicum liaison and the practicum supervisor, has significant responsibility for his/her learning and is expected to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of the practicum experience. Specific expectations of students during the practicum application and interview process are discussed in detail in Section II of this manual (Policies and Procedures for the Practicum Education Placement Process). The following details student responsibilities for participating in practicum internships.

### **Guidelines for Professional Behavior in the Practicum Internship**

Students are expected to always demonstrate professional behavior while they are in the practicum. Common examples of professional behavior include maintaining an agreed-upon schedule, arrival, and departure at the agreed-upon time, contacting the internship site as soon as possible if they need to be absent, and following a written agreement for making up missed time. Students are expected to always conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the values and ethics of the social work profession and with local, state, and national laws. A copy of the current NASW *Code of Ethics* is provided in the MSW Program Manual.

Students should dress in a manner consistent with practice at the internship site but should never dress more casually than most of the staff at the site. Extremely casual attire, such as jeans, tank tops, and casual t-shirts, are rarely appropriate for students, except possibly when engaging in field trips or play activities with clients and only with prior guidance and approval from the practicum instructor. Students should demonstrate an understanding that professional dress communicates respect for clients and promotes trust in the worker's professionalism. Students must not dress in ways that might reasonably be viewed as sexually provocative or offensive by clients or agency staff and/or may reflect negatively on the student, the organization, or the Social Work Department's professional image. Appropriate attire is expected whether the student is in-person at the internship site or engaging in video conferencing or other visible remote activity.

Students must follow NASW guidelines for dual relationships and other inappropriate behaviors with clients. It is also important that students take great care in monitoring and maintaining professional relationships with field site staff. Concerns, questions, and/or changes related to relationships and boundaries with clients and staff should be discussed as soon as possible with the practicum instructor and/or the faculty liaison.

### **Field Placement Hours**

The required number of hours for each practicum placement is described in detail in Section I of this manual as part of the discussion of the practicum courses. It is recommended that, before the start of the practicum, the student develop, in consultation with the practicum instructor, a full schedule of hours, week by week, for the full internship placement from September to May. The following provides considerations for schedule planning as well as examples of activities that are generally considered part of the internship placement experience and included in placement hours. Students should consult their faculty practicum liaison with any questions about whether a specific activity is considered part of the practicum placement.

- Generally, students begin practicum placement during the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September. The second semester of practicum placement is usually completed in early May, and not earlier than May 1<sup>st</sup>. The schedule for practicum placement is designed to establish an overall practicum experience of sufficient length to provide time for professional growth and development over the practicum placement period and to coincide with the academic year along with the duration of concurrent practice courses and integrative practicum seminar in each semester. Requests for earlier or later start or finish dates may be considered under unique circumstances but must have prior approval from the Practicum Education Director and will only be granted based on specific needs and considerations within the Social Work Department and internship placement site.
- Students are expected to negotiate practicum placement hours during the semester break directly with their practicum instructor and in consideration of client and internship site policies and obligations. Students are encouraged to collaborate with their faculty practicum liaison regarding any uncertainty about practicum placement during the semester break.
- Orientation, direct client service, supervision, “shadowing” of other staff, activities assigned by the practicum instructor, completion of required process recordings, record keeping, staff meetings, attendance at practicum site-sponsored seminars, workshops, or other organization in-service training, are considered part of the practicum experience and are included in practicum internship hours. With agency and supervisor approval, attendance at conferences or other training not directly sponsored by the practicum site may be allowed as part of the practicum.
- School holidays, agency holidays, lunchtime, commuting time to and from the student's practicum site, or other activities not required by the practicum site are not included as practicum hours.

- Participation in the weekly integrative practicum seminar is required of all practicum students as part of the overall field practicum course.
- Occasionally, due to illness, an unavoidable delay in the start of practicum, or other reasons, students fall behind in their field hours and may not complete the required number of hours by the end of a semester of practicum. If this happens at the end of a semester, the student may receive a grade of "Incomplete" (I) for that semester of practicum until the required hours are completed. Both the practicum instructor and faculty practicum liaison must approve a specific plan for completion.
- Students are required to complete Internship Placement Hours Timesheets that are electronically signed by both the student and the practicum instructor and reviewed by the faculty practicum liaison regularly. Internship Placement Hours Timesheets are located on the SOCW Practicum Docs (IPT) web-based system. Students will receive instruction in the completion of the Timesheets during the first weeks of the integrative practicum seminar.
- Students may not receive a grade for the practicum until all required practicum placement hours as well as the practicum evaluation form are completed, documented, and approved.

### **Use of Practicum Site Material and Confidentiality**

Students are responsible for assuring clarity and confidentiality about the use of any internship site materials (i.e. agency forms) for course or practicum assignments and should discuss any questions with their practicum instructor and/or faculty practicum liaison before the use of such material. Students may not remove official internship site documents and/or materials (i.e. client charts) containing client information from the practicum placement site for any reason. Students are responsible for following all practicum site policies regarding the use of electronic health records and any other confidential client information.

Students are expected to develop and demonstrate a working understanding of specific internship site policies and procedures regarding client confidentiality. In general, clients should not be discussed in the presence of anyone (including internship site employees) who is not directly involved with the case, except in formal case conferences or supervision. Students should never discuss any potentially identifying details of cases with other students, friends, family members, and/or intimate partners. The same adherence to confidentiality is expected in all settings, including if the student is providing services or any other related activity remotely. Actual client names or any other potentially identifying information may not be used in students' process recordings, journals, course notebooks, papers, seminar discussions, etc. Students who violate these confidentiality rules may be dismissed from the practicum and/or referred to the Academic Review Committee (ARC).

### **The Learning Agreement**

The Learning Agreement Template is located on SOCW Field Docs (IPT). Students will receive instruction on completion of the Learning Agreement during the first few weeks of the integrative field seminar and are expected to complete an electronic draft no later than the end of their fifth week of internship placement. This document should reflect the student's goals for the practicum



placement experience, the agency's expectations, and the Social Work Department's requirements. The Learning Agreement will be drafted by the student in collaboration with the practicum instructor and reviewed by the faculty liaison. The student, the practicum instructor, and the faculty practicum liaison must electronically sign the completed Learning Agreement. The Learning Agreement will become the basis for the evaluation process. Copies of the student's Learning Agreements are retained in the student's permanent record to assist faculty in describing the student's practicum experience in recommendations and letters of reference.

### **Use of Supervision**

Internship site staff that supervise students are called practicum instructors or practicum supervisors. Although more than one person at a practicum site may guide and/or supervise students, every student is assigned a primary practicum instructor and is expected to meet at least once a week face-to-face for a minimum of one hour with the primary practicum instructor. As previously stated, when necessary and approved, video conferencing will be considered as face-to-face supervision. Students should come to supervisory sessions prepared to discuss specific internship-related issues, cases, concerns, or questions. As part of the integration of classroom and internship experiences, students are also expected to share with the practicum instructor course materials and syllabi in addition to appropriate classroom discussions and experiences.

An additional hour of task-oriented and/or group supervision per week is also required and may be provided either directly by the primary practicum instructor or by internship site staff assigned by the primary practicum instructor. An appropriately trained staff member who may or may not have an MSW may provide this additional supervision.

## **VI. Evaluation of Practicum Education**

Evaluation is a semester-long process that actively involves the student, the practicum instructor, and the faculty practicum liaison. Integrative seminar instructors/faculty liaisons monitor the student's placement through regular seminar discussion and individual communication with the student and with concurrent review of the student's practicum timesheets, process recordings, and other written work. The faculty practicum liaison will also provide the practicum instructor with several means of making contact throughout the internship and encourage regular communication and collaboration.

### **Identification and Resolution of Difficulties that Arise in the Internship**

Difficulties in Internship Placement may be first identified by the student, practicum instructor, or faculty practicum liaison. All parties are encouraged to collaborate in efforts to resolve the difficulties and improve the overall practicum performance and experience.

Practicum Instructors who have any concerns regarding any aspect of the student's performance are strongly encouraged to communicate with the faculty practicum liaison if efforts directly with the student have not been successful and/or the practicum instructor deems the problem more serious and requires immediate action. Very often, collaboration between the practicum instructor and the faculty practicum liaison and/or the combined efforts of the practicum instructor, faculty practicum liaison, and the student result in improved performance. Practicum instructors who feel the nature of the concern does not allow communication with the faculty practicum liaison are expected to contact the Practicum Education Director, who will intervene as required.

Students are expected to notify the faculty practicum liaison as soon as possible if difficulties within the internship placement, with the practicum instructor, and/or other agency staff arise. This includes difficulties first experienced and identified by the student or difficulties the student has been made aware of by the practicum instructor and/or other agency staff. Students who are having trouble in the internship should utilize the following process:

1. Attempt to resolve the difficulties with the assistance of the practicum instructor at the internship site. Depending on the difficulty, this step may involve the practicum instructor coaching the student in ways to attempt to resolve the problem him/herself, as problem-solving and self-advocacy are an important part of the student's education. If this does not resolve the problem or the student feels unable to discuss the difficulty with the practicum instructor, the student should:
2. Request assistance from the faculty practicum liaison promptly. In most cases, difficulties can be resolved through the combined efforts of the student, the faculty practicum liaison, and the practicum instructor. If the resolution involves an ongoing process or is serious, the faculty practicum liaison is expected to develop a written plan with the student, including the specifically identified concerns, an improvement plan, a timeline for resolution of the difficulties, and identification of possible consequences for failure to correct the problem. Due to the nature of most practicum-related problems, the faculty practicum liaison may need to work closely with the practicum instructor in the development and monitoring of the plan. The faculty practicum liaison may also request assistance and/or consult with practicum education program staff at any time. If the difficulty is not resolved in this manner and/or the faculty practicum liaison determines the problem/concern is more serious and requires further action:
3. The Practicum Education Director should be informed (*by the student and/or faculty liaison and/or practicum instructor as appropriate*) and may, after investigation, consider resolutions up to and including adjustments to and/or change of placement, probation status for practicum, or removal of the student from the practicum. If the student is asked to leave the placement by the internship site and/or the Practicum Education Director removes the student from the field site, the Practicum Education Director will request review by the MSW Program Committee. The MSW Program Committee may recommend a plan of action and/or refer the student to ARC (*process detailed in the MSW Program Manual*).

In situations other than removal from the practicum placement and if the student, practicum instructor, faculty practicum liaison, and Practicum Education Director cannot agree on an appropriate course of action or consider the problem/concern of a more serious nature requiring further action, the Practicum Education Director will request review by the MSW Program Committee. The MSW Program Committee may recommend a plan of action and/or refer the student to ARC.

4. If a student feels he or she was unfairly treated during the above process, he/she has the right to have his/her situation reviewed through the University's academic appeals process.

## **Probation/Dismissal Policies for Students in the Practicum**

Since Social Work practicum placements are considered an essential component of the social work student's academic preparation for social work practice, all reasons for being placed on probation or for being dismissed from the program, including unsatisfactory performance in the practicum, are academic reasons. Student behaviors that may result in probation and/or dismissal from the practicum and/or the program, and the student's rights during the processes of ameliorating problems, establishing probationary conditions, and dismissal, are described as follows:

### **Examples of student behaviors that may result in probationary status in practicum:**

- A pattern of resistance to internship site assignments and policies, insofar as those assignments and policies do not conflict with ethical standards for professional social work.
- Failure to comply with the agreed-upon schedule for the practicum placement, except in the case of illness, emergency, or the death of someone in the student's personal support system. In those exceptions, students must notify the internship site and faculty practicum liaison as soon as possible of the need for absence.
- Failure to notify the practicum instructor and, if appropriate, scheduled clients, within a reasonable time before any unscheduled absence.
- A pattern of arriving late and/or leaving early from the practicum placement.
- Failure to attend supervision every week and/or failure to use supervision to discuss practicum-related issues.
- Use of practicum placement time for work that is not practicum-related and/or not agreed upon with the practicum instructor.
- Failure to demonstrate active engagement in the learning process.
- Other patterns of behavior that are of mutual concern to the practicum instructor and faculty liaison.

### **Examples of student behaviors that may result in dismissal from the practicum:**

- Serious or repeated violation of social work ethics as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics.
- Breaking a law in an agency-related matter or conviction of a felony during the practicum year. *(If it is discovered while the student is in their practicum that the student has failed to disclose a prior criminal conviction or open criminal case at the time of application or a conviction that occurs during the placement, this may also be considered grounds for dismissal.)*

- Evidence of chemical dependence or substance abuse while enrolled in the social work program.
- A serious breach of an internship site's policy.
- Falsifying time sheets or other practicum placement records or reports.
- A consistently resistant or hostile attitude toward learning or supervision.
- An unwillingness or inability to carry out appropriate assignments in the practicum placement.
- Behavior that is emotionally or physically dangerous to agency clients, staff, or other students.
- Failure to achieve a passing grade in the Social Work Practicum.

Student rights and responsibilities concerning probationary status in practicum and/or dismissal from practicum are discussed earlier in this section of the manual under **Identification and Resolution of Difficulties that Arise in the Practicum**. Additional information is also provided in the MSW Program Manual.

### **Evaluation of the Student by the Practicum Instructor**

Students and practicum instructors will be provided with information early in the practicum about the formal evaluation and submission process. In addition to the formal evaluation form completed electronically by both the practicum instructor and the student and the evaluative element of the mid-semester site visit, the faculty liaison will assist the student and practicum instructor in evaluating the student's progress toward meeting the specific learning goals that the student had identified in his or her *Learning Agreement*. The student's practicum instructor will complete a formal written evaluation at the end of each semester in the field. The student should have the opportunity to discuss the content and then read and sign the evaluative materials written by the practicum instructor before they are submitted to the Faculty Liaison and ultimately the Social Work Program. The student's signature does not mean that the student and the instructor are necessarily in agreement about its content but rather that the student has had an opportunity to read and discuss the evaluation report with the instructor. Students have the right to submit an electronic addendum or rebuttal within the evaluation form, that can be viewed by the practicum instructor and faculty practicum liaison if differences have not been resolved through discussion. All evaluations are expected by the dates specified in the Practicum Education Calendar. These evaluation forms will become part of the student's permanent record.

### **Evaluation of the Practicum Experience by the Student**

Students complete a self-evaluation as part of the formal end-of-semester evaluation process. Students will also have informal opportunities to provide feedback about the practicum placement throughout their time in the internship. Students will also be provided with formal opportunities to

verbally evaluate various aspects of the placement experience at the once-a-semester liaison visits. Formal written feedback about the placement experience may be solicited from the student at or before the end of the second semester of the placement and will be kept in confidential agency records by the practicum office.

### **Evaluation of the Practicum Experience by the Practicum Instructor**

Practicum instructors will be provided with informal opportunities to provide feedback about the practicum experience to the faculty practicum liaison throughout the course of the placement. Practicum instructors will also be provided with formal opportunities to verbally evaluate various aspects of the practicum experience at the once-a-semester liaison visits and are also encouraged to contact the faculty practicum liaison and/or the Practicum Education Director at any time to discuss their experience with the practicum placement or the Social Work Program. Formal written feedback about the placement experience may be solicited from the practicum instructor at or before the end of the second semester of the placement and will be kept in confidential records by the practicum office.

### **Practicum Course Grade Assignment**

The faculty practicum liaison is responsible for the student's final grade assignment for the practicum course after considering all assessments utilized during the practicum, including, but not limited to, the practicum instructor's evaluation, the student's self-evaluation, student's performance in the integrative practicum seminar, and the student's completion of required placement hours.

## **VII. Additional Policies and Procedures**

### **Malpractice and Liability**

While still quite rare, lawsuits against social service agencies and colleges and universities have become more common in recent years. Students need to be aware that they may be sued individually or become involved in lawsuits against entire agencies or programs. The University also may be held liable for student misbehavior or malpractice in the practicum or for any perceived failure on the part of program faculty to provide the student with sufficient information, training, or appropriate protection of client well-being and confidentiality.

As an agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Westfield State University maintains, for each student and designated faculty member, professional liability insurance coverage in the minimum amount of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per person and three million dollars (\$3,000,000) in the aggregate. Westfield State University will furnish evidence of such coverage on an annual basis as requested.

Students are strongly encouraged to also purchase private malpractice insurance to cover potential liability in the case of legal action involving them individually and/or as a party to legal action against an agency or program. Low-cost student malpractice insurance for students who are NASW members is currently available from NASW. The Field Education Director may also have information about other insurance options.

Students can limit their own risk and liability by developing a solid understanding of the NASW *Code of Ethics* and the policies and expectations of Westfield State University, the policies and expectations of the Social Work Program, as outlined in the Practicum Education Manual and MSW Program Manual, and the policies and procedures of the field site where they are completing their practicum placement.

Students who are concerned about the ethics of specific site practices or specific assignments, students who experience discrimination, and students who experience sexual or other forms of harassment from supervisors, agency staff, clients, fellow students, or University faculty or staff, are urged to bring these concerns to their field instructor and the Practicum Education Director (for internship related concerns), or to the MSW Program Director (for concerns that are not related to the internship) as soon as possible.

### **Travel**

Students are responsible for travel to and from their internship site and for any associated costs for parking. If students will be expected to travel during practicum placement hours (i.e. outreach to client homes) this must be discussed and agreed upon by the student and the authorized representative of the practicum site during the interview process, including whether or not the practicum site will provide reimbursement for travel expenses. Agreements between the student and practicum site for travel during practicum placement hours must be included in the Learning Agreement. The WSU Social Work Program is not responsible for any costs incurred by the student and/or field site for student travel. In most circumstances, students should be prepared to assume all costs related to travel related to the field placement.

### **Transportation of Clients**

Students are *not* covered under the Commonwealth's self-insurance policy maintained by Westfield State University for the transportation of clients in their vehicles or for driving agency-owned vehicles. Standard personal automobile insurance policies also do not typically cover the transportation of clients in one's vehicle. Thus, *students should not transport clients in their vehicles, nor should they be asked to transport clients in agency vehicles unaccompanied or as the driver of the agency vehicle.* If students accompany clients in an agency vehicle driven by an agency employee, an additional agency employee, who is the responsible party, should accompany them.

### **Student Membership in NASW**

All students are encouraged to join the National Association of Social Workers and will need to be NASW members to be eligible for NASW student malpractice insurance. Students who are members will gain access to a great deal of information about local social work events and state and national issues affecting social workers. This information is provided in the national and state publications that are mailed and/or emailed to the student and through access to the "members only" sections of the NASW website. Students may also gain access to information about available positions in social

work through NASW publications and online resources. Applications for NASW membership and NASW malpractice insurance are available on the NASW website ([www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)).

### **Practicum Advisory Board**

The Practicum Advisory Board (PAB) is chaired and convened by the Practicum Education Director and is additionally comprised of the Assistant Practicum Education Director, a faculty member, and community stakeholders. PAB provides consultation on the content and process of the components of practicum education and meets throughout the year for discussion and consequent recommendations related to practicum issues. The Board may initiate and/or respond to issues in areas such as student needs and concerns, agency and community needs and concerns, the current practice environment, integration of internship experiences and curriculum, and practicum policies and procedures as well as any additional requests for consideration from the Practicum Program or Department of Social Work. Additionally, the Board may develop and complete specific projects to support and make recommendations to the practicum program and/or the Department of Social Work.

### **Other Policies and Procedures**

Additional policies and procedures, including policies related to nondiscrimination and affirmative action, sexual harassment, hazing, religious holidays, grading, infectious disease standards, and leaves of absence, are described in the Westfield State University MSW Program Manual. Students are advised to develop a working understanding of the specific information provided in the MSW Program Manual, a copy of which is available on the WSU Social Work website at [www.westfield.ma.edu/socialwork](http://www.westfield.ma.edu/socialwork). Practicum instructors and other interested parties may request a copy of the manual and/or access the manual on the WSU Social Work website.