

Social Welfare Program Practicum Handbook

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Purpose of the Practicum

The purpose of the Social Welfare Practicum is to provide students with an opportunity to apply the conceptual knowledge and skills acquired through their academic courses to work with a specific client system in a social services setting. The practicum is considered to be integral to the education and professional socialization of social welfare students, providing a structured and supervised environment in which students may apply theoretical knowledge, test and refine practice skills, adopt professional behaviors, receive ongoing feedback, engage in self-assessment and introspection, and examine personal values and biases.

Prerequisites

Prior to enrolling in the Community Agency Practicum (SOW 4511) and the Practicum Seminar (SOW 4510), social welfare students are required to complete the following courses with a grade of “C” or better:

- SOW 3203 Social Welfare Institutions
- SOW 4302 Social Work Practice I
- SOW 4322 Social Work Practice II

General Requirements

Social welfare students must complete the prerequisites detailed above in addition to the Community Agency Practicum (SOW 4511) and the Practicum Seminar (SOW 4510). The Practicum is a 3 credit course in which students are required to complete 150 hours of unpaid service at a designated community provider of social services. While completing their Practicum, students are also required to enroll in the Practicum Seminar (SOW 4510).

Social Welfare minors must also complete one elective (3 hours) with a grade of “C” or better. A list of approved electives is available on the Social Welfare Program webpage. Additional Sociology requirements for Social Welfare track students may also be found on the Social Welfare webpage. Students should consult their advisor for a specific course of study.

Criminal Justice Majors

Social Welfare minors, who are also Criminal Justice Majors, are not required to complete a practicum placement for both programs. However, students must coordinate with the Criminal Justice and Social Welfare Program Directors to select a practicum placement that meets the requirements of both programs. Students are also required to enroll in SOW 4511 and SOW 4510 while completing their Criminal Justice practicum and earn a grade of “C” or better in order to earn a Social Welfare Minor and receive a Certificate in Social Welfare. Finally, it is expected that students adhere to the policies and procedures described in this handbook.

Application & Placement Process

Students who wish to enroll in the Community Agency Practicum (SOW 4511) must receive prior approval from the Social Welfare Program Director. In order to receive approval, social welfare students must submit a Practicum Application by the specified deadline. Deadlines and other important dates are posted on the Social Welfare webpage. An electronic copy of the Practicum Application may be printed or downloaded from this page as well.

Upon receipt and review of the student's completed Practicum Application, the Social Welfare Program Director will contact the student to arrange an appointment to discuss his or her career goals and interests as well as potential placement agencies. Following the interview, the Social Welfare Program Director will grant successful applicants approval to enroll in SOW 4511 and SOW 4510 and to contact prospective agencies. *Students are prohibited from contacting agencies prior to receiving approval from the Social Welfare Program Director.* Placement agencies must be selected from the Agency Placement List, which can be downloaded from the Social Welfare program webpage. Students who wish to complete their practicum at an agency not included in the list must receive approval to do so from the Social Welfare Program Director.

Upon approval from the Social Welfare Program Director, students may contact prospective agencies to arrange interviews with each agency's practicum supervisor. If a student wishes to accept an agency's placement offer, he or she should then submit the following paperwork to the Social Welfare Program Director to confirm his or her placement:

- **Placement Confirmation Form**—This document must be signed by both the student and the agency practicum supervisor.
- **Release of Liability**—This document must be signed and dated by the student or his or her guardian.

The Placement Confirmation and Release of Liability forms must be submitted prior to the first day of the semester in which the student wishes to complete his or her practicum. Deadlines for submission will be posted on the Social Welfare Program webpage. Students who do not submit all required forms will not be permitted to begin their practicum.

Eligibility Criteria

In addition to meeting the above specified academic requirements, it is incumbent upon students to meet the eligibility criteria specified by placement agencies in order to secure a practicum placement. Although criteria vary, agencies commonly require practicum students to successfully pass local, state, and federal background screenings as well as drug tests. Students who are not

able to secure a practicum placement due to a criminal history or the use of illicit substances will not be able to complete the social welfare program or earn a Certificate of Social Welfare.

Employment-Based Practicum

Employment-based placements are strongly discouraged and generally prohibited by the University and the Social Welfare Program for the following reasons:

- The agency may focus primarily on the student's productivity rather than his or her learning and growth.
- If the student's job duties change, the position may no longer meet the criteria and objectives of the Social Welfare Program.
- Both the student and the agency may be less willing to disclose problems that arise during the practicum, such as inadequate supervision, situations that threaten the student's employment status, etc.

Students who wish to petition the Social Welfare Program Director for an exception must do so in writing. Written petitions should be directed to the Social Welfare Program Director and will be considered by the Social Welfare Program Director and the Department Chair. In order to receive an exception, students must demonstrate that employment-based placements meet the following criteria:

- The employment activities must constitute a new learning opportunity for the student.
- The employment activities must be congruent with the level and objectives of the Social Welfare Program.
- The student's supervisor must have adequate supervisory experience and an educational and employment background in a human services profession (e.g., social work, social services, counseling).
- The student's supervisor is willing to provide an adequate level of supervision and caseload control, if applicable, to emphasize the student's educational experience over the agency's productivity needs.

Student's Role in the Practicum

During their practicum, it is the role and responsibility of students to:

- Be proactive in seeking out new learning opportunities and experiences.
- Adhere to agency policies and procedures.
- Adhere to University regulations and policies, including those contained in the UNF Student Handbook (<http://www.unf.edu/studentaffairs/>).
- Adhere to the guidelines described in this handbook.

- Adhere to the NASW Code of Ethics (<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>).
- Understand and follow agency security precautions and safety protocol.
- Understand and complete assigned duties and tasks, meet deadlines, and seek direction when needed.
- Meet regularly with the practicum supervisor.
- Remain cognizant of limitations in knowledge and skills when working with clients.
- Participate actively in the practicum seminar, completing all required assignments.
- Understand and protect the confidentiality and privacy rights of agency clients and employees.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries with agency clients and employees.
- Report supervision issues, ethical violations, and critical incidents (e.g., threats, injuries, accidents) immediately to the practicum supervisor and the Social Welfare Program Director.
- Seek feedback regarding performance, and accept constructive criticism.
- Complete and submit all monitoring and evaluation forms, including time logs, required by the agency and the Social Welfare Program.

Practicum Supervisor's Role

It is the role and responsibility of practicum supervisors to:

- Provide a comprehensive orientation (detailed below) to students.
- Provide regularly scheduled supervision to students.
- Provide students with adequate work space and equipment.
- Collaborate with students and other agency personnel to create a wide range of learning opportunities appropriate to the student's knowledge and skill level.
- Model professional and ethical behavior.
- Monitor students' progress on an ongoing basis, providing regular feedback and constructive criticism.
- Complete all evaluation and monitoring tools required by the Social Welfare Program.
- Evaluate students' progress and performance in a respectful, fair, and rigorous manner.
- Participate in site visits with students and the Social Welfare Program Director.
- Report performance issues, ethical violations, and critical incidents (e.g., threats, injuries, accidents) immediately to the practicum supervisor and the Social Welfare Program Director.

Social Welfare Program Director's Role

It is the role and responsibility of the Social Welfare Program Director to:

- Provide information to students, agencies, and other interested parties regarding the objectives and requirements of the Social Welfare Program.
- Coordinate the practicum program, insuring a wide variety of placement options for students.
- Interview students applying for a practicum, assessing their readiness for a field experience.
- Make every effort to insure a good fit between the student and the agency in terms of each party's needs and interests.
- Provide suggested learning goals to guide the selection of specific learning objectives and activities by students and their practicum supervisors.
- Provide guidelines and tools for the evaluation of students' progress and performance in the practicum.
- Provide information and training to agencies and practicum supervisors regarding the supervision and evaluation of students.
- Monitor students' practicum performance and experiences, including the quality of supervision provided by the agency.
- Facilitate the practicum seminar on a weekly basis.
- Create structured learning activities that help students integrate theory with practice and evaluate personal growth.
- Conduct site visits at least once per semester with students and their practicum supervisors.
- Assist in problem-solving and the development and implementation of a corrective action plan, in the event of performance or supervision issues.
- Facilitate the termination of a placement, if doing so is in the best interests of the student and/or the agency.
- Facilitate an alternative placement, in the event of a placement termination initiated by the student.

Reporting to the Practicum Placement Agency

Students should report to their placement agency on the date determined by the Social Welfare Program Director and the agency. Typically, this date shall be during the first week of the semester in which the student is enrolled in SOW 4511. Students may not report to their placement agency prior to the first day of the semester or prior to submitting all required placement confirmation documentation to the Social Welfare Program Director.

Agency Orientation

Practicum students should be provided with a comprehensive orientation to the placement agency immediately upon their arrival. This orientation shall be conducted by the practicum supervisor and include:

- Introduction to agency personnel and organizational structure
- Discussion of agency's history, mission, services, and target population(s)
- A copy of the agency's policies and procedures and/or personnel manual
- Written description of the agency's security precautions and safety procedures
- Written guidelines for handling client emergencies (e.g., suicidal or homicidal threats)
- Written guidelines for reporting suspected abuse and/or neglect
- Written guidelines for obtaining informed consent, handling confidential data, and releasing confidential data
- Review and discussion of agency reporting requirements, such as intake assessments, progress notes, etc.
- Discussion of expectations regarding supervision
- Discussion of student's role and responsibilities

Time Logs

Students are required to maintain time logs to document hours completed at their placement agency. Time logs should include dates and times of hours worked and should be signed by both the student and the agency practicum supervisor prior to submission to the Social Welfare Program Director at the end of the semester. Falsification of time logs shall be grounds for receipt of a failing grade.

Restricted Activities

Practicum students are expressly prohibited from engaging in the following activities:

- Conducting home visits without being accompanied by an authorized agency employee;
- Transporting agency clients in personal vehicles; and,
- Transporting agency clients in agency-owned vehicles without being accompanied by an authorized agency employee.

Safety Issues

During their practicum, students may be exposed to some risks associated with working in the field of social services. Examples of such risks include making home visits, meeting with clients after-hours, and working with individuals who may behave in an unpredictable manner or have a communicable disease (e.g., HIV, AIDS, Hepatitis). To minimize risk, students are prohibited from engaging in any of the restricted activities listed in this handbook. Further, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with their agency's security precautions and safety protocol and to discuss any safety concerns with their supervisor

and/or the Social Welfare Program Director. Critical incidents, such as threats, injuries, or accidents, should be reported immediately to the practicum supervisor and the Social Welfare Program Director.

Confidentiality

During their practicum, students are likely to have access or be exposed to confidential information regarding the agency's clients or employees. It is the responsibility of practicum students to become familiar with and adhere to all of the confidentiality policies and procedures of the agency in which they complete their practicum.

Site Visits

All practicum students are required to schedule and participate in a site visit with their agency practicum supervisor and the Social Welfare Program Director prior to the administration of the Mid-Term Evaluation. Additional site visits may be scheduled, if necessary, to assist in problem-solving. If a problem is noted during the initial site visit, the Social Welfare Program Director will collaborate with the student and the agency practicum supervisor to create and implement a corrective action plan.

Evaluations

Practicum students are required to submit a Mid-Term Evaluation and a Final Evaluation completed and signed by their agency practicum supervisor. These evaluations are intended to provide feedback to the student and the Social Welfare Program Director regarding the student's performance and achievement of learning objectives. In addition, students are required to submit a Practicum Evaluation at the conclusion of their practicum. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide information to the Social Welfare Program Director regarding the nature and quality of the learning experience and supervision offered by the agency.

Termination of a Placement

Termination of a practicum placement may be initiated by the student, the Social Welfare Program Director, or the agency practicum supervisor at any time during the practicum in the event of a critical incident, ongoing performance issues, unethical or unprofessional behavior, or serious risk to the student or an agency client. The Social Welfare Program Director should be notified immediately by the student or the agency practicum supervisor if there are issues of concern related to the performance or behavior of the student or the supervisor that cannot be resolved internally. The Social Welfare Program Director will arrange to meet with the student and the agency practicum supervisor to assist with problem-solving and the development and implementation of a corrective action plan, if appropriate. If it is determined by

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the Director that it is in the best interests of the student or the agency to terminate the placement, the Director will work with the student to make alternative arrangements to complete the practicum elsewhere. Students who do not successfully complete the practicum will not earn a passing grade in SOW 4511 or SOW 4510, and, therefore, will not be eligible to receive a Certificate of Social Welfare.

Acknowledgement of Receipt

After reviewing the Social Welfare Program Practicum Handbook, please sign the acknowledgement below and return this page to the Social Welfare Program Director. Please maintain a copy of the handbook for your records.

I, _____, have read and received a copy of the Social Welfare Program Practicum Handbook. I understand that I should contact the Social Welfare Program Director if I have questions about the policies and procedures discussed in this handbook. I also understand that I am required to adhere to the policies and procedures detailed in this handbook while completing my social welfare practicum.

Student's Signature

Date