

FIELD EDUCATION IN SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS



FIELD EDUCATION IS A CORE PART OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Field Education—also called practicum—is the core learning experience in social work education. It is where students connect classroom theory with real-world practice and learn directly from experienced social work professionals.

Students register for and earn academic credit for field education, though it does not function like a traditional class. Instead, the “classroom” is a community-based human service agency that partners with UW Tacoma to support the education of future social workers.

While similar to an internship, field education is different in one important way: it is a structured academic experience with clearly defined learning goals, required competencies, and practice-based outcomes that students must demonstrate to progress in the program.

Field education is a required component of every Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited social work program and is central to students’ professional preparation and applied learning.

TYPES OF FIELD PLACEMENT (BASW & MSW)

Foundation Placement BASW & MSW

- Focuses on generalist social work practice
- Designed to build foundational skills across:
 - Micro (individuals)
 - Mezzo (families, groups, organizations)
 - Macro (communities, policy, systems)
- Placed at a partner social service agency affiliated with the MSW program

Introductory course

- **40-hour** seminar (1 credit) in the Spring quarter of the first year

Field placement

- MSW Generalist **360 hours** in a community-based agency
- BASW Generalist **440 hours** in community-based agency

Timing

- MSW Generalist: completed over **Summer, Fall, and Winter**
- BASW Generalist: completed over **Fall, Winter, and Spring**

Total

- MSW Generalist: **400 hours**
- BASW Generalist: **480 hours**

Schedule

- Individual scheduling considerations may be discussed with your Field Faculty. **Most practicums operate during standard business hours*

Advanced Specialized Placement (MSW Final Year)

- Focuses on specialized or advanced social work practice
- Example settings may include:
 - Medical Social Work
 - School Social Work
 - Behavioral Health/Mental Health Therapy
 - Veterans’ Affairs Social Work
 - Macro Social Work Policy, research, or administrative environments
- Allows students to deepen skills with a specific population or practice area

Field placement

- **680 hours** in a community-based agency

Timing

- Typically completed over Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring

Total

- **680 hours**

Schedule

- Individual scheduling considerations may be discussed with your Field Faculty. **Most practicums operate during standard business hours*

Quick Reference to Field Education Terminology

Field Education

Also known as practicum, it supports real-world social work learning by coordinating field placements, training instructors, and ensuring students meet program requirements and graduate ready for practice.

Field Faculty

Social Work program staff, including the Director of Field Education, who coordinate field placements, serve as agency liaisons, and assess student progress through site visits and evaluations.
One individual may hold multiple roles.

Field Instructor (FI)

The agency-based social work professional who provides on-site supervision and serves as the primary contact with the school regarding student performance. Field Instructors hold an MSW with at least two years of post-degree experience and are approved by both the agency and the school. Exceptions may be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Off-Site Field Instructor (OSFI)

A Field Faculty member who provides ongoing supervision to students placed at agencies without a degreed social worker on staff. These placements are approved on a case-by-case basis as exceptions to Field Education policy.

Task Instructor (TI)

Also known as a Task Supervisor (TS), the role provides day-to-day supervision of a student's learning at the agency when the Field Instructor is not available on-site. Task Instructors are not required to have a social work degree and work in collaboration with the Field Instructor.

PRISM

The online system used by UW Seattle and Tacoma to manage and track field placement activity, including Learning Contracts and quarterly evaluations. Students access PRISM using their UW NetID; practicum documents are shared with field agencies as needed for review and approval.

Field Education Learning Experience

Inclusive, real-world practice

- Work with diverse individuals and communities across social identities
- Learn to apply strengths-based, client-centered ethical social work practice
- Guided by Field Instructors who model professional values and ethics

Engage in learning

- Individual supervision and coaching
- Applied learning through managing cases, projects, and simulations
- Discussion, readings, role plays, and (when available) group seminars

Connecting class & field

- Coursework aligns directly with field placements
- Students share syllabi with Field Instructors
- Assignments intentionally integrate theory and practice

