BSW Senior Practicum Orientation Guide
Department of Social Work
College of Health and Human Services

2014-2015
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Introduction

This manual is designed to provide an orientation to the Senior Practicum application process. Congratulations on reaching your final year in the Department of Social Work. You will find the upcoming year an exciting opportunity for learning and final preparation for entering the world of social work professional practice. You will be very busy and involved in the work of the practicum and completion of the senior portfolio. Please try to stabilize those issues in your life which have been distracting for you and learn to focus your attention and manage your time well. This manual will be a reference to you during the year, along with the Senior Practicum Manual that you will receive prior to beginning senior practicum.

Should you be applying for Senior Practicum?

This is the first question you should be asking. Only students who have met the requirements are eligible for entering the Senior Practicum experience.

You must be admitted to major:

♦ Have you completed at least 45 credit hours with a GPA of 2.5 or better?
♦ Have you completed BIOL 103, ENGH 101, SOCI 101, PSYC 100, and GOVT 103 or 132?
♦ Have you earned at least a "C" in SOCW 200, SOCW 301, SOCW 357, a human behavior course (SOCW 323 or 340), and a policy course (SOCW 351 or 370)?
♦ For the spring 2014 semester, are you enrolled in SOCW 358, 362, and any of the above listed courses that you have not yet completed? Please note that you MUST complete all of the following courses (including their prerequisites) before the fall semester when you begin your senior field practicum:
  SOCW 200, SOCW 301, SOCW 357, SOCW 358, SOCW 362, SOCW 323, SOCW 340, SOCW 351, SOCW 370

The basic qualifications for Senior Practicum are listed below:

♦ Minimum of 90 credit hours by the end of the Summer
♦ Already admitted to major and completion of all junior level field hours by May 15 (special approval needed for exceptions)
Completion of core Social Work courses with a grade of C or better (does not include social work electives)

Completion of all immunizations no later than October of year practicum will begin (PPD and Hepatitis B Series)

Senior Practicum Application completion

Submission of electronic copy of resume

**Core Social Work Classes**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOCW 200</td>
<td>Introduction to Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCW 301</td>
<td>Laboratory in Interpersonal Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCW 323</td>
<td>Human Behavior in the Social Environment I</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCW 340</td>
<td>Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment II</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCW 357</td>
<td>Methods of Social Work Intervention I</td>
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<td>SOCW 358</td>
<td>Methods of Social Work Intervention II</td>
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<td>SOCW 362</td>
<td>Groupwork Laboratory</td>
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<td>SOCW 351</td>
<td>Social Policy and Social Justice I</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCW 370</td>
<td>Social Policy and Social Justice II</td>
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</tbody>
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**Senior Practicum: A Different Experience**

**THE FACTS**

Senior practicum is very different from junior level community based experiences. It is designed to provide an intensive generalist experience to prepare you for entry level practice. Generalist means that over the time you are in the agency setting, you will have the opportunity to work with individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities using many different intervention approaches requiring knowledge and a variety of different skills.

**What is Senior Practicum?**

Senior practicum is a highly structured experiential community based learning opportunity that involves social work students working in a human service agency setting under the supervision of a social work professional. Each student will have a supervisor that is called a field instructor. The role of the field instructor is to plan the learning experience and evaluate the growth and performance of the student. Your field instructor will be a key person in your life during the practicum. Their role will be supervisory and developmental in nature.

**What is the schedule of Senior Practicum?**
BSW senior students will spend 2 days or 16 hours per week in the field practicum. We ask students to be available for two days from among Monday, Wednesday or Friday days for practicum. Agencies will also have a preference for the days they would like you to complete the practicum. You are not allowed to set up a schedule that involves 3 or 4 hours on multiple days. Because we desire for a strong consistent experience, students are ideally expected to spend blocks of time in the agency. The ideal would be two full 8 hour days. Sometimes variations in the schedule are necessary but these must be approved by your faculty liaison. If for example, your supervisor wants you to lead a group that meets at 7 on Wednesday, then modifying your schedule seems reasonable based upon this learning opportunity. Your hours in field are monitored weekly by your faculty liaison and field instructor. All students are expected to be able to clear 2 days per week in preparation for the senior practicum. Please make accommodations with employers and family members because the inability to have the proper hours available will preclude you from completing senior practicum.

**Weekly Seminar**

Each student will be assigned to a weekly seminar. The seminar meets on Tuesdays at either 12:00 noon and one seminar meets on Thursday at 12:00 noon. Seminars meet once weekly. Students are assigned to the seminar by the Director of Field Education. Once assigned to a seminar, you will remain in the same seminar for the full year. We may have available a hybrid section that will combine alternating face to face meetings and online sessions. Students cannot register into the seminar until notified because this is a closed registration process. This will usually occur in late July or early August.

**Seminar**

Students are assigned to the seminar with others representing many different agency settings. This will allow you to learn about social work roles in multiple settings. The seminar is conducted by an adjunct faculty member called a **FACULTY LIAISON**. The faculty liaison facilitates the seminar. This individual will also be the one to provide a grade. The Liaison has the responsibility to visit you once in your agency setting where you are placed. They will discuss your status with your agency supervisor and assist in handling problems or issues that arise during the practicum.

**How are students supervised?**
The supervision of senior students is very different from junior level placements. Students are required to have one hour per week in supervision time. Although there will be times when things occur that will lead to cancellation of supervision time or modification of the time, this will be monitored through your weekly report. Supervision is an important aspect of monitoring your learning. Field instructors will complete a mid term and a final evaluation each semester.

You will be provided supervision through multiple processes. You will not only be expected to have weekly supervision time with your field instructor, your faculty liaison will monitor your status weekly through weekly reports that you submit that describe your activities, learning process and times for supervision. Generally all students will be supervised by a person holding an MSW although accreditation requirements allow some flexibility. Some placements have highly experienced field instructors who may not hold an MSW degree but your faculty liaison is an MSW and provides supervision for you as well through the seminar. According to accreditation standards BSW students can be supervised by a person holding a BSW degree with commensurate experience and approval of field faculty.

You will receive an orientation to the field in August which includes specific guidance on the use of field software that the program utilizes.

**Assignments**

Senior students complete a senior portfolio. This document is centered on the competencies that you are expected to demonstrate prior to graduation. Weekly logs are required to be completed as well. This document will provide a comprehensive demonstration of your learning. Details will be covered in the orientation to the Senior Practicum held in August.

**THE PROCESS**

**Application to Major and Field**

You are expected during your junior year to complete the application for both admission to major and senior field application. This application along with your resume is what will be used to find a placement.

**Application Steps**

**STEPS**
The Placement Process

Guidelines for Completion of the Application

The application is the first statement about yourself therefore you should seek to provide make sure you have good writing. The application is an online application. You should be able to place your information within the slots allowed. The first part of the application may be sent to field instructors, but the second part contains information necessary for field education faculty to develop a placement. Generally the resume will be sent to field instructors. If you don’t know how to do a resume please consult http://careers.gmu.edu/Presentation/ResumeBasics/index.htm.

Once you have applied for senior practicum you should make an appointment with your advisor to make sure that you are on track to graduate at the end of your senior year.

Senior Field Practicum Application

Practicum Placement Information

Special Circumstances
- Senior Practicum will be an exciting opportunity to apply classroom content. In order to place you in an agency, please share any information that might impact your ability to get the most from your senior practicum.

Criminal Backgrounds
- We have a departmental policy that requires students who have a felony charge or conviction or DUI to disclose the information and provide a copy of an official rap sheet listing the charge to the Director of Field Education. Students with pending charges as well as current charges should notify the Director of Field Education prior to the placement. You will be asked to sign a release that will allow for the Director of Field Education to share this information with your field instructor. This is necessary for compliance with state laws about who can and cannot work in certain agency settings. Failure to comply with this request can become grounds for application fraud. If you have a criminal background it could impact your ability to obtain a senior placement in certain settings. Please keep in mind that if you complete an application in an agency and provide false information, you can sometimes be charged with application fraud.

Geographic Consideration
Students are generally placed in the metropolitan area. This includes Washington D.C., Virginia, Maryland. Most placements are in the Northern Virginia area. If you have questions please discuss with the Director of Field Education (BSW)

**Generalist experience**

- Students are asked to identify their top three choices from a list of populations. If you are not sure what your preferences are or you are open, please feel free to indicate this. You will receive a quality learning experience. The Director of Field Education will have further discussions with you about options. Keep in mind; it is the faculty’s responsibility to ensure that you receive a generalist learning experience first. We consider commutes of 30-45 minutes are reasonable.

**Choice of Settings**

- Consideration will be given to the top choices that you have identified. Expect that you will be notified of one of these choices is not available.

**Supervision Needs**

- You are asked to share comments about the kind of supervision you need. All students will receive required weekly supervision and this is monitored by the program. This question asks about your preference based upon your learning style.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE PROSPECTIVE PLACEMENT INTERVIEW**

The interview is an important connection point between the student and the prospective field instructor.

**First Impression**

When you call the agency to make an appointment, make sure you are courteous to the personnel who answer your call. If you have difficulty in reaching your supervisor after three tries, please notify the Director of Field Education (BSW) for assistance. Your phone contact is the first impression that the agency will have of you. Please be on time. For most your first connection will be through email. Make sure that you don’t use unprofessional language and that you don’t have poor grammar and spelling.

**Preparation for the Interview**

It is not necessary that you know a great deal about the agency setting where you will be interviewing. You might want to determine if there is
an agency website and read information on the program. Think about some questions that you might ask as well during the interview. This makes an early statement about you.

Although dress may be casual at the agency setting, please dress professionally for the interview. Don’t make assumptions that you don’t need to dress professionally. Again you are making a statement about yourself and first impressions are important. Remember the content in SOCW 301 about professional dress.

**Screening**

Although the field personnel would have paved the way for you to interview, the onus is on you as to whether the agency will accept you. Agencies make their own choices about who will be selected as a student intern. They are looking for students who are enthusiastic about learning, motivated, excited and desire to do hard work. It is not a problem if you are not able to determine in this first interview what you will be doing for the entire year. Your field instructor should get to know you and learn your interests. The learning contract will provide a means of discussion between you and your field instructor regarding the kind of experiences you will be able to have.

If your supervisor determines that you are a good match for their environment, they will accept you and notify the Office Field Education to send the final paperwork.

**What is the link between my senior practicum placement and my career?**

Some students consider that having their senior practicum in a particular agency will position them for employment in their desired field of practicum. While many students get offered opportunities for work after the practicum, this is NOT a primary consideration for senior practicum. Your senior level experience is dictated by learning goals and accreditation requirements and not employment considerations. In fact, many students get jobs in fields of practice which they had not even planned to work. The Social Work Department provides a good core learning experience that will provide you with the basic skills to work in many settings.

**What if I interview and I am not accepted?**

Students can be rejected by agencies for many reasons. The bottom line is that students are only accepted for a practicum in an agency if the agency chooses to do accept them. The Department of Social Work has
does not have the ability to require agencies to accept a student. Students are selected based upon the quality of their interview and interactions with agency staff. They also review resumes and consider the background and experience of the student. Keep in mind that agencies are aware that you are a student and will be coming to learn, therefore generally their expectations are appropriate. The interview is very important because of these factors. When students are rejected, it must be determined as to why the student is rejected. If a student is rejected because of a factor directly related to the student, such as the student seemed unprepared for the interview or seemed unmotivated or could not respond appropriately in the interview, we will seek to provide some guidance and support to the student prior to the next interview. Students are only allowed to be interviewed and rejected twice because of student factors. If the agency determines they don’t want to accept a student or the supervisor is no longer available, or the agency can’t meet our requirements, these are not student factors. Students will receive another referral to a different agency.

Please understand that any student who is unable to obtain a practicum because there are personal, student factors that have resulted in being rejected two times may not be able to continue in Senior Practicum. Students must be able to ascertain a practicum experience in order to graduate with a social work degree. It is a fairly infrequent occurrence that students are rejected from multiple agency settings after a review for student factors. It does happen sometimes and we have to review these cases carefully when social work professionals are not willing to accept a student because of a deficiency in the student.

Timing

Placing students takes a long time because students are placed one by one. We consider that the placement process will begin in late spring and not conclude until summer. Because students are placed individually someone will be first and someone will be last. Please be patient, we will place all students.

Summary

This manual has provided an overview of the information you need to understand the placement process. As you can see there are multiple considerations in preparing your materials, being interviewed, supervised and finally placed. If you have questions, please free to contact DR Davis at 703 993 2028 or email her at mdavi7@gmu.edu or DR Clark swfield.gmu.edu.
Enjoy Your Senior Year!!!