



School of Social Work

AGENCY CRITERIA

Developing and Maintaining Practicum Settings

Developing and maintaining practicum settings is viewed as a collaborative process between UGA School of Social Work, the Field Education Program and local community social service agencies. This collaborative process is ongoing and entails responsibilities for the social work program, the student and the agency. While each partner has specific responsibilities in the educational process, the overall guiding principle for developing and maintaining settings is the interest in and willingness of the agency to provide high quality learning experiences for graduate social work students.

An attempt is made to maintain a diversity of settings with respect to type of client served, problems addressed, and intervention approaches utilized. The following criteria for practicum settings, criteria for selection of practicum instructors and faculty liaison responsibilities are viewed as necessary ingredients for sound learning experiences.

The School draws on the following criteria for field site selection:

1. Administrative policies regarding service to clients, to other agencies, and to the community should be consistent with the sound standards of practice appropriate to the particular type of agency.
2. The agency should show stability of program and of financial support. Alternatively, it may be at the cutting edge of innovative programming or practice.
3. The agency should show ability to respond to the changing needs of the community.
4. The agency should show capability for accommodating students. This includes a willingness to designate a single, professionally-trained social worker as the agency practicum instructor who has sufficient professional practice experience, time, and interest to implement a quality learning experience for the student.

5. Preference is given to agencies that can provide stipends to financially needy students. Please see section titled “Financial Support/Stipends.”
6. The agency must be endeavoring to meet progressive standards of practice. This should include providing a wide variety of diverse practice behavior learning experiences appropriate for masters’ level social work students.
7. The agency setting must function in a manner consistent with social work values and ethical principles.
8. The agency must provide consistency with social work program mission statement and program goals and core competencies.
9. The physical resources necessary for a quality learning experience must be available.
10. Agency should have formal safety policies and procedures (pages 10-14).
11. The agency must have the potential for school/agency cooperative efforts (joint research projects, consultation, and in-service training).
12. There must be commitment on the part of the agency to enter into a long term relationship with the School involving the training of numerous students over time.
13. The agency and school will enter into contractual agreement regarding the mutual expectations for affiliation (appendix H).

The decision to include a particular agency setting in the array of possible social work practicum placement is made after a minimum of one meeting by the Director of Field Education or field coordinators with relevant agency personnel. The meeting may be an agency meeting or practicum trainings. The meeting is for the purpose of sharing information about respective programs and interests, and an articulation of the potential practice behavior learning experiences that will be available. Because social welfare agencies are constantly changing, the faculty liaison must assess the continuing adequacy of the social work practicum setting.

FIELD INSTRUCTION CRITERIA

1. The agency must offer a favorable setting and atmosphere conducive for learning.

2. The agency must provide training opportunities in general practice methods and/or in concentration applicable to the School's curriculum.
3. The agency must have one or more staff members who qualify as field instructors.
4. Adequate facilities must be available. These include provision of office space, work materials, and equipment as needed for the student. The student's use of agency cars must be included in the agency's insurance policy if driving is expected of students.
5. The agency must allow all field instructors time for attending field instructor training offered by the School of Social Work.
6. The agency must allow all field instructors time for preparation for student instruction, for regular conferences with the student, consultation with School faculty, and, if needed, attendance at meetings held at the School.
7. The agency must be willing to reimburse the student for costs (such as travel expenses) incurred while conducting agency business. Agencies may not require students to transport clients.
8. The agency agrees that no student trainees accepted by the agency will be discriminated against on the basis of race/ethnicity, sex, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, age, marital status, disability, Vietnam-era veteran status, or sexual orientation.
9. As required by federal and state law and by University of Georgia policy, field placements, as a whole, must 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 field placements in particular kinds of settings—as students without disabilities. However, given the wide range of disabilities, it is possible that not every placement site will have the capability 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 this same site could easily accommodate students with visual or hearing impairments. Every effort is made by the Field Instruction Program in consultation with the Office of Disability Services to ensure equal access to practicum opportunities.

AGENCY SAFETY GUIDELINES

Most agencies are under enormous pressure. Reduced budgets and clients with increasingly critical needs and histories of negative involvement with social services have resulted in increasing tensions in social work settings. As a result, social workers have experienced a variety of threatening situations, and some have been harmed. Social work students cannot be completely insulated from the realities of professional life, nor should they be. On the other hand, students frequently lack the experience and skills that help more seasoned practitioners assess danger and take appropriate precautions. The School recognizes its responsibility to help prepare students to handle potentially dangerous situations by providing students with safety training and classroom content on safety issues. Appendix D on Personal Safety should be carefully reviewed by field instructors and students. However, we also need to make a serious effort to try to reduce risks in field settings.

The following guidelines are designed to supplement the School's agency selection criteria. Modification of guidelines for particular students and special circumstances may be made in the student's educational agreement with the explicit approval of the faculty liaison to the agency and the Field Education Office. Moreover, it is recognized that the implementation of these guidelines may take some time. A liaison may determine that, while an agency is not currently meeting all guidelines, it is making a good faith effort to do so and current conditions are sufficiently safe to proceed with a field placement.

1. A field agency should have a policy and/or procedures on safety covering the following matters:
 - (a) Building and office security
 - (b) Emergency procedures, including when and how to summon security or police assistance
 - (c) Staff responsibilities and procedures governing the management of violent clients
 - (d) Safety on home visits, including when, where, and under what conditions visits should or should not be made, when the student should be accompanied, and how backup is provided (see four and five below)
 - (e) Alcohol and drug use policy formulated and posted

- (f) Guns and other weapons policy formulated and posted
 - (g) Procedures for logging and communicating with staff and students all incidents or threats of violence
 - (h) Policy for aftermath of assault and threat of assault. Provision of support services for victim's family and/or staff and clients who may have witnessed the assault
 - (i) Relationship with police should be established
2. The agency should provide each student with a copy of the above policies as a part of the student orientation to the agency, and provide training on safety issues and procedures. Consideration should be given to in-service training on clinical and administrative management of violent clients and violent situations outside the agency. The agency and each of its programs should have a well-rehearsed specific plan of action in which students know exactly what to do in case of danger, from recognition of the signs of agitation to code words for signaling for help, when to call for police, clearing the building, etc. This plan of action should be rehearsed with students placed at the agency and reviewed on a regular basis.
 3. Though a student has the right to refuse a dangerous assignment, a common understanding about the kinds of assignments that are appropriately safe should be reached by the student, the field instructor, and the faculty liaison. The following types of activities should be discussed with either the faculty liaison to the agency to determine if these activities should be assigned to a student:
 - (a) Physical restraint of clients
 - (b) Treatment of a client with a history of emotionally volatility
 - (c) Home visits to areas that are high risk (see #5)
 - (d) Treatment of a client with a history of violence
 4. The student's field instructor should know, or be able to easily ascertain the student's location during fieldwork hours and should discuss with the student any activities that require special planning with regard to safety.

5. Thorough preparation should be made for student home visits with consideration given to the following elements:
 - (a) Selection of clients and home environments that are not assessed to be dangerous to the student
 - (b) Provision of a safe means of transportation, whether by agency vehicle, the student's car, or public transportation where such can be judged to be normally safe
 - (c) Discussion of the neighborhood, including any potentially dangerous areas
 - (d) Discussion of appropriate risk-reducing behaviors in the neighborhood and in the client's home
 - (e) Clarification of the purpose and development of a specific plan for the visit
 - (f) Discussion of what to do should the client or anyone else presents a threat to the student
 - (g) Provision of appropriate support and backup. Depending on the situation and the student's experience with home visits, this may range from an accompaniment by another worker or security person to immediate availability of telephone consultation. The student's field instructor should know when a visit is to take place and at a minimum, telephone consultation must be available.
 - (h) In some situations, the student should be given permission not to make the home visit
6. Consideration should be given to the following features pertaining to the agency facilities:
 - (a) Adequate lighting inside and outside the agency
 - (b) Adequate phone system for signaling emergencies
 - (c) Arrange office furniture for an easy exit of client and worker
 - (d) Minimize amount of unescorted traffic within the agency

If a student is threatened or injured while in placement, or involved in an incident where his/her safety is or could be compromised, the incident should be reported immediately to the faculty liaison to the agency, to the Field Education Office (706) 542-5419, or to the Office of the Dean (706) 542-5424.

*Source for "Agency Safety Guidelines": University of Michigan School of Social Work Field Manual, 1997.