

What is Practicum?

CSWE Educational Policy 2.2—Signature Pedagogy

“Field Education Signature pedagogy represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of the practitioner. Professionals have pedagogical norms with which they connect and integrate theory and practice. In social work, the signature pedagogy is field education. The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting. It is a basic precept of social work education that the two interrelated components of the curriculum—classroom and field—are of equal importance within the curriculum, and each contributes to the development of the requisite competencies of professional practice. Field education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program competencies.”

Concurrent Practicum Model

The MSW program follows a concurrent model for Practicum Education, requiring students to engage in practicum seminar classes while actively completing their year-long practicum placement. This integrated approach ensures that students continuously apply theoretical knowledge to real-world social work settings, fostering a deeper understanding of professional practice. Throughout the academic year, students receive structured support and supervision, enabling them to develop essential skills in client engagement, intervention strategies, ethical decision-making, and policy implementation. This model fosters professional growth by enabling students to reflect on their experiences, receive feedback from faculty and peers, and refine their competencies in preparation for advanced social work practice.

MSW Program Practicum Education Generalist Year

As part of the curriculum, students must complete a minimum of 460 clock hours in the Generalist Year Practicum Education, providing hands-on experience in real-world social work settings. Built on a broad liberal arts foundation, the curriculum equips students with the essential knowledge and skills necessary for generalist social work practice. It covers key topics such as social work values and ethics, the needs of at-risk populations, human behavior in the social environment, social welfare policies and services, and principles of diversity, social and economic justice. Additionally, students engage in coursework focused on social work practice methods and research, ensuring they develop both theoretical understanding and practical competencies. Completion of the foundation curriculum within the generalist year of the practicum placement is mandatory for all students, as it establishes the core competencies required for advanced study and professional practice in social work.

MSW Program Practicum Education Advanced Standing and Specialization Year

As part of the curriculum, students must complete a minimum of 500 clock hours in the Specialization Year Practicum Education. The specialization year has two specialties that build on the foundation curriculum content. These specialty practice areas are Children and Family Services and Mental Health. The Children and Family Services specialty practice area equips students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for direct social work practice with children and families. This area of practice offers courses that facilitate practice with children, adolescents, adults, geriatric consumers, families, small groups, and diverse communities,

including rural, urban, and military populations. Within the Mental Health specialty, areas of focus are on diagnosis and disorders in children, adolescents, adults, elders, and families with mental health concerns. The Advanced Practicum Education requires a minimum of 500 clock hours.

Program	Number of Hours Required Per Week	Number of Hours Required Per Semester	Total Hours Per Year
Generalist Year 1 st year Full-Time 2 nd year Part-Time	16	230	460
Specialization Year 2 nd year Full-Time 3 rd year Part-Time	24	250	500
Advanced Standing	24	250	500 <i>+400 from the BSW program</i>

Placement Guidelines and Unique Placements

Student Placement

To be considered for a practicum placement, students must have been admitted to the MSW program and be in good academic and non-academic standing. **The Director of Practicum Education assigns placements** based on student preferences, program criteria (including alignment with CSWE competencies and program goals), and/or faculty input. Students receive a placement confirmation notification and are required to schedule an interview with the assigned agency. Final placement is confirmed upon receipt of agency confirmation. If not confirmed, the Director will assist in securing an alternate placement.

Location of Site Placement

Students enrolled in the MSW or Advanced Standing programs are expected to accept practicum placements within a 60-mile radius of the University. Students who prioritize the proximity of the practicum placement may limit their practicum placement options. Depending on resources, the Practicum Office may be unable to meet these requests. In addition, placements in agencies outside Bladen, Columbus, Cumberland, Hoke, Johnston, Moore, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, and Scotland counties will require special consideration by the Practicum Director.

Virtual Options

Virtual Placements

A virtual placement, in this context, refers to a remote work experience where interns are approved to work primarily from a location of their choice, utilizing digital tools and technology to perform tasks and collaborate. However, at least 90% of the students' work must involve direct interactions with clients or customers, either through phone calls, video conferences, emails, or other communication channels. While some tasks may involve computer-based work, the primary focus is on building relationships, providing services, or addressing client needs, ensuring that the intern gains significant hands-on experience in social work practice roles. All virtual placements must be approved in advance by the Practicum Office.

Evening/Weekend Placement

Evening and weekend placements are extremely limited, and the Practicum Office cannot guarantee the availability of such placements. The school strongly encourages students to enroll in traditional, daytime placements, as evening and weekend options are not only limited but also subject to various approval criteria. Before the Director of Practicum Education approves a weekend or evening placement, several important factors will be carefully considered, including:

- **The level of agency supervisor involvement and oversight** during evening or weekend hours to ensure the student's work is adequately supported and supervised.
- **Opportunities for the student to engage in key activities**, such as staff meetings and other work-related functions that are typically conducted during standard work hours and enhance the student's learning experience.
- **Access to clients and agency supervisors** during evening or weekend hours, ensuring that students can effectively interact with both clients and the supervisors, which is vital for their professional development.

Given these factors, students interested in evening or weekend placements should be aware that approval is not guaranteed, and traditional placements are strongly recommended to ensure a comprehensive and well-supported practicum experience.

Placements with Family Members

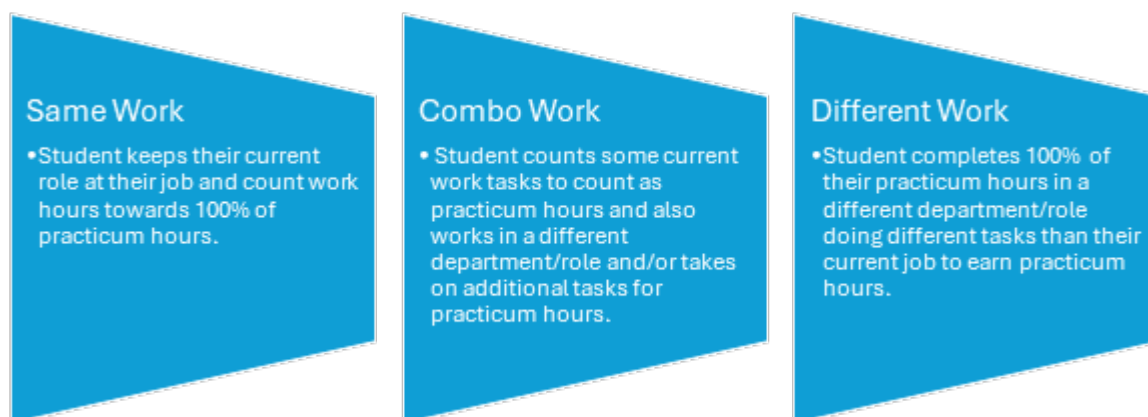
To avoid conflicts of interest, students are not permitted to complete their practicum in an agency or institution owned by a family member or close personal or family friend. Additionally, students are not permitted to complete their practicum in an agency or institution where a family member, close personal friend, or family friend holds an administrative role. Additionally, a student's family member, personal friend, or close family friend may not serve as a practicum supervisor for the student. Students must notify the Practicum Office if a family member is employed in any capacity with the placement agency, organization, or institution. Additionally, if the student or a close family member has received services from any local agencies that might be recommended as a practicum placement based on the student's interests, that information should also be provided.

Employment-Based Placements

Students working in eligible social work-related organizations may have the option to complete their practicum placement at their workplace. An employment-based practicum placement must achieve all the placement objectives for a social work student. The student must engage in generalist or specialist practice activities under the supervision of qualified agency or task supervisors approved by the School of Social Work. The agency or task supervisors may be their direct supervisor; however, they must meet all the requirements outlined to be a supervisor, which includes the CSWE minimum requirements. The objectives must be reviewed by the student, the prospective agency/task supervisor, and the Director of Practicum. The School of Social Work must ensure that the employing agency supports the placement as an educational experience and is committed to providing the necessary time and supervision to engage in discrete learning activities with specific learning objectives related to the placement objectives. The employing agency is expected to assist the student and the university in creating and maintaining an environment that facilitates learning.

Students interested in pursuing an employment-based practicum placement are responsible for securing and maintaining employment in a social work-related organization. The Practicum Office does not assist students in securing employment to pursue an employment-based practicum placement. For a student to complete a practicum placement with a specific agency, a fully executed MOA must be in place between the agency and the university. Once students have applied and been approved by the Practicum Office for an employment-based practicum placement, the Practicum Office will initiate the onboarding and affiliation process. **This process can take several months. While it is rare, students should be aware that it is possible for the agency and the university to disagree on the required terms, which could prevent the student from completing the placement with that agency.**

Types of Employment-Based Practicum Placements



Students interested in doing “combo work” or “different work” will need to discuss with their employer whether these tasks can be completed within their regular working hours or if they will require additional hours beyond their current schedule. All students wishing to pursue an employment-based placement, even those planning to undertake the same work, should discuss their plans with their employer to ensure that the employer will allow the student to complete the practicum placement at the agency or organization.