

FIELD PLACEMENT FAQ

HOW ARE PLACEMENTS DETERMINED?

Factors include your department's field expectations, an agency's ability to provide suitable learning experiences for you as an intern and a qualified MSW field instructor's willingness to supervise. Specific military field experiences are not required for the Military Social Work track.

WHAT HAPPENS ONCE A PLACEMENT SITE IS IDENTIFIED?

All students will be notified via email when their placement specialist has identified a community-based field placement site. The email has your placement information and a request to contact your assigned agency for an interview.

If you are a traditional student, you will receive your email while you are enrolled in the Virtual Field Practicum (VFP). If you are an advanced standing student, you will receive this email while completing your first semester of department courses and will start your field placement in the subsequent semester.

After receiving the email, you must immediately contact your field instructor to schedule the interview. At this interview, you should, among other things, discuss the scheduled hours of your internship, orientation and trainings, and specific agency requirements and clearances. In most cases, all agency requirements and clearances must be completed prior to working directly with clients.

WHAT ARE THE CLEARANCE REQUIREMENTS?

Traditional MSW students must complete the VFP requirements before starting the community-based field placement.

Agencies often require fingerprinting, criminal clearance and tuberculosis (TB) testing. Some agencies require proof of car insurance, a good driving record, a medical evaluation and/or drug testing. You may incur additional costs related to these requirements. Discuss the clearance requirements and any required trainings/orientation with your agency during your interview and in subsequent pre-placement communications with agency personnel.

CAN I COMPLETE FIELD PLACEMENT WITH MY EMPLOYER?

Your place of employment (POE) may be considered a community-based field placement if the following criteria are met:

- All of the required field hours must take place under the supervision of an MSW field instructor who is not the student's employment supervisor and who meets the educational and experiential standards of our program.
- The field placement assignment must be different from the student's regular work assignment.
- The activities themselves must constitute new learning for the student, e.g., working with a new population or utilizing a new treatment methodology in a new field of practice.
- The student's educational goals should be the primary focus of this request, not the needs of the agency.
- The location of the assigned work space for the field placement should be a different location than the assigned work space for the role of employee.

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An administrative review and approval is required for POE requests. Additional information may be requested. Given the extent of information and additional work required to ensure the proper learning environment, the field placement team cannot guarantee in advance that your POE can serve as your placement.

If you are interested in learning more about whether your agency could serve as a field placement, please contact vacdev@msw.usc.edu, and a member of our placement support team will contact you to discuss your specific situation.

CAN I COMPLETE MY FIELD PLACEMENT INTERNATIONALLY?

Community-based field placements are not secured outside the United States. The only field placement assignment available to students living or moving outside the United States is Telehealth, a clinical placement that operates on a virtual system.

A placement with Telehealth is a highly sought-after opportunity that will allow you to participate in intensive training, work directly with a licensed clinical social worker and provide one-on-one counseling virtually to adults. The interview process is demanding, and there are strict requirements for your internet speed and availability in Pacific Standard Time (PST). For more information, contact an admissions counselor at 1-877-700-4679.

WHEN DO I COMPLETE MY PLACEMENT HOURS?

Community-based field placements occur on weekdays during regular business hours (Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.). Students must make adjustments to accommodate a weekday schedule. If you request evening/weekend hours, your placement may be significantly delayed due to the limited number of agencies that provide appropriate supervision during those hours. We cannot guarantee placements at alternate times.

If your community-based field placement begins after the field start date, you will receive updates from the field placement team and are expected to work with your field liaison and field instructor to determine how you will meet the required hours for your practicum. In some circumstances, this might mean additional hours per week or an extended length of time with the agency.

WHAT TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION ARE REQUIRED?

The first semester of field education for traditional MSW students is through the VFP, so no travel is required. For your community-based field placement, we make every attempt to locate an educationally appropriate placement as close to your residence as possible, preferably within 30 miles from your home. At times, the best placement match is farther from your home than you may prefer. You are required to be able to travel up to 30 miles to your placement site.

If you do not have a vehicle, the number of options for your community-based field placement will be limited, and not having a vehicle may delay securing your placement. If you have travel restrictions or need special accommodations, contact the university's disability office for assistance.

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HOW WILL I BE EVALUATED?

You will be evaluated by the field instructor and field liaison and will receive a grade for each semester of field practicum (including traditional MSW students' VFP semester).

WILL I RECEIVE COMPENSATION FOR MY FIELD PLACEMENT?

The VFP and most of our community-based field placement agencies do not provide a stipend or salary for students. While some agencies offer stipends for language ability or other special circumstances, we do not select agencies based on whether a stipend is provided, but rather on the type of learning opportunities available to students. Because we do not require agencies to compensate students, a stipend or salary is never guaranteed.

WHAT IF I NEED TO TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE?

To initiate a leave of absence (LOA) before you begin your community-based placement, please speak with your placement specialist and Student Success Advisor (SSA). Once you begin your community-based placement after your semester in the Virtual Field Practicum (VFP), you should work directly with your field liaison and SSA to initiate an LOA.

If you intend to take an LOA due to health reasons, which encompasses physical and mental health, you must meet with the university's Student Health Leave Coordinator to determine the efficacy of an LOA, develop a plan for addressing the challenges during the LOA (if approved), and set goals for your return. You must notify the registrar's office of your return at least 12 weeks before the start of the semester for the field placement team to be able to secure a community-based agency placement.

If you were in a community-based placement before taking the LOA, we will discuss the viability of you returning to your previous placement upon your return.

WHAT IF I HAVE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES?

As part of the field placement process, you will complete an online Field Placement Form that includes the opportunity to describe any special circumstances. You must also alert your placement specialist of any special circumstances that may impede your community-based field placement as soon as possible so they can take these requests into consideration without jeopardizing your confidentiality or the agency requirements. Examples include lack of transportation, limited hours of availability for the field practicum/internship and felony convictions.

If you are not forthcoming about this information or the nature of your special circumstance, it may impede or significantly reduce placement options available in your community and create a delay in securing your placement.

WHOM DO I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

Current MSW@USC students should contact their placement specialists or faculty regional directors, and prospective students should contact their admissions counselor.