

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

What is the difference between “Practicum” and “Internship Placement”?

- The “Practicum” refers to the total educational experience, consisting of both a weekly integrative Foundation/Advanced seminar, an internship placement, and for the BSW students a capstone.
- “Internship Placement” is the location at which you are doing your internship.

When do I complete my Practicum Internship?

- Practicums begin in the Fall Semester and continue across both the Fall and Spring Semesters in the same field site. Your program of study determines when you complete it.

Full-Time (2 years): Foundation Practicum Year 1; Advanced Practicum Year 2
Part-Time (3 years): Foundation Practicum Year 2; Advanced Practicum Year 3
Part-Time (4 years): Foundation Practicum Year 2; Advanced Practicum Year 4
Full-Time Advanced Standing (1 year): Advanced Practicum Year 1
Part-Time Advanced Standing (2 years): Advanced Practicum Year 2

Can I start my internship in the Spring or Summer?

- No, due to the structure of our BSW and MSW programs, courses offered, and internship site needs we cannot accommodate any modifications to the expected Fall start time.

How many hours are required in the internship placement?

- MSW Foundation – 400/year – 200/semester – 18.75/week
 - MSW Advanced – 500/ year – 250h/semester – 20/week
 - MSW Advanced RIZE Grant – 720/yr. – 360/semester – 24/week
- **School-Based Social Work requires 450 hours in MA to be hired****

What is the Weekly Integrative Practicum Seminar?

- This seminar provides students with an opportunity to discuss and compare internship placement experiences, learn from, and teach each other, examine personal values and ethical issues in social work practice, and further integrate knowledge and experience through structured assignments, activities, and group processes, which may also be connected to assignments in other courses. The overall goal of the practicum seminars is to help students make connections between their academic work in social work and their internship experiences. In addition, by bringing students together from many different work settings, the seminars offer an opportunity to broaden each student's exposure to the internship of social work through the sharing of experiences and ideas in the seminar sessions.
- During the Foundation Placement, students attend this seminar synchronously (either in-person or through Zoom) weekly; the Advanced Seminar is a weekly online asynchronous course. Students remain in the same seminar section during the entire placement (both fall and spring semesters). Students register for the practicum course, including the seminar, during the regular registration timeframes. However, it is important for students to understand that assignments to specific seminar sections are made by the Practicum Education Director to provide the best possible learning environment for all of the seminar participants. The location of each student's placement, students' social work experience, and the overall needs of each seminar group are considered in making these assignments. The instructor for the Practicum Seminar is also the student's Faculty Practicum Liaison for the field placement, conducting site visits and serving as the primary contact between the social work program, the practicum instructor, and the practicum site.

When does the internship placement process begin?

- Students should understand the requirements and timing of internship placements concurrently with application and acceptance into the program. Advance discussion with employers, family, and other support systems to consider adjustments to schedules and responsibilities is often very helpful in facilitating a successful internship placement experience. Specifically, it is important to be prepared to have daytime hours available to complete practicum placements.
- Full-time incoming students begin the practicum application process concurrently with acceptance to the program. For example, a student admitted in April to begin one of the full-time programs (either full-time traditional or full-time advanced standing) in September would complete the practicum application within 10 days of acceptance and begin working with the practicum program immediately.
- Current (returning) students begin the application process very early in the spring semester before the upcoming fall semester when they are scheduled to begin placement. For example, a student scheduled to begin a field placement in September will complete a practicum application and begin the process no later than February 1st.
- The Practicum Education Program works in collaboration with each student individually over the course of the spring semester and summer to obtain an appropriate internship placement. It is essential that students understand that locating and establishing new practicum sites can take several weeks and, in many cases, may take several months. Students who return incomplete practicum applications and/or do not actively collaborate with Practicum Education staff may risk delayed entrance into the

internship and subsequent delay in completing field requirements.

What kinds of placements are there?

- MSW Foundation internships are first-year practicum courses that address generalist practice skills.
- MSW Advanced internships are your second-year practicum which should have a clinical component.

What kind of placement settings are available?

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| --Inpatient/outpatient clinical support | --School social work |
| --Community Based Programs | --Hospital Settings |
| --Corrections/Criminal Justice | --Housing Programs |
| --Child Protection Agency | --Homeless shelters |
| --Substance Use Treatment programs | --Case Management |
| --Domestic Violence Support Programs | --Nursing Homes |
| --Residential Programs | --Hospice Programs |
| --Veterans Support Services | --Public Assistance |
| --Early Childhood Education | --Public Welfare |

More can be made if practicum and supervisor requirements can be adhered to, and it is established through the Practicum Team.

Can I choose my placement?

- Students work in a collaborative process with the Practicum Education Program to determine internship placements. While students' particular interests and needs are considered to the extent possible, it is important that students understand that the Practicum Education Program staff makes final decisions regarding internship placement assignments, and those decisions are based on many variables. Occasionally students will have an interest in a placement site that our program does not have an affiliation with. This may open an opportunity for the Practicum Education

Program staff to explore the feasibility of the potential site to determine if it meets the requirements for a social work internship placement. In other cases, the lack of affiliation with a particular placement site may be the result of a previous decision made by the Practicum Education Program and not be an option. Students are not permitted to initiate contact with a potential internship placement site without discussion and approval from the Practicum Education Program.

I have to work and can't get time off. Can I do my placement in the evening and on weekends?

- There are a very limited number of placements that include some hours in the evening and/or on weekends and, like other placements, these change from year to year. Within the limited number of placements with any evening and/or weekend hours, most only accept students for the advanced year placement due to the expectation for more independent activities. The overwhelming majority of placement sites require students to be available during normal daytime business hours and it is crucial that students plan accordingly before beginning the field placement process. Students should also refer to the Practicum Education Manual regarding policies for evening/weekend placements.

Are there any paid internships?

- Typically, we do not have paid internships available for students. While we wish we consistently had this option, it simply is not available at all times.
- In the 2023-2024 school year, we secured two grants (RIZE, and EOHHS) that offer funding for students in their last year, Internship: A paid internship opportunity.

****PAID INTERNSHIPS ARE NOT GUARANTEED**

****GRANT OPPORTUNITIES CHANGE YEAR TO YEAR**

What is the Integrated Behavioral Health Collaborative (IBHC) Fellowship?

- In 2021 the Social Work Program at WSU was awarded a 4-year, \$1.5 million Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) grant to continue the Integrated Behavioral Health Project we began with an HRSA grant in 2017. The IBHC Integrated Behavioral Health Equity Project provides opportunities for students to gain expertise in integrated behavioral healthcare while addressing health equity and social determinants of health, within medically underserved areas in Western and Central Massachusetts. This is an intensive training fellowship for MSW students completing their final (advanced) clinical practicum at an approved IBHC Grant site within Western or Central Massachusetts. IBHC Fellowships are competitively awarded each year and provide a \$10,000 stipend for the academic training year. Students interested in the Fellowship will be required to complete an additional application process. More details about the IBHC Fellowship are available in the Practicum Education Manual and on the department website.

What are the Supervision Requirements?

- An MSW from an accredited school of social work and a minimum of 2 years post-MSW experience.
- MA Licensure is required (LCSW or LICSW) or equivalent social work licensure in another state.
 - LICSW/LCSW is referred for advanced placements.

Can students transport clients during their internship?

- No, they cannot.

- Students are not covered under the Commonwealth's self-insurance policy maintained by Westfield State University for the transportation of clients in their vehicles or for driving agency-owned vehicles. Standard, personal automobile insurance policies also do not typically cover the transportation of clients in one's vehicle. Thus, *students are not permitted to transport clients in their vehicles, nor should they be asked to transport clients in agency vehicles unaccompanied or as the driver of the agency vehicle unless the agency specifically provides insurance that will cover the student under these circumstances.* If students accompany clients in an agency vehicle driven by an agency employee, an additional agency employee, who is the responsible party, should accompany them both.

I completed an interview for one site, but I saw another that interested me. I'd like to wait to interview with another agency before I make a decision, can I do that?

- The Practicum Education Team recommends against this; waiting and interviewing with multiple sites could result in the loss of availability of a previously offered internship and is all-around problematic when identifying internships for all students.

Where are placements located and how far will I have to travel for my placement?

- Students should expect to complete their internship placements in a location that is *within no more than a 60-mile radius of Westfield State University.* It is crucial that students understand this does not mean that the Practicum Education Program can develop a placement in every location that is within a 60-mile radius. The Social Work Department has affiliation agreements with over two hundred field placement sites within this geographic area and continues to develop additional sites each year. While some students complete placements within a short distance from their

home, other students will need to commute to access specific kinds of settings that are not available closer to home or WSU.

What if I have a documented disability and expect to request reasonable accommodations in my internship placement?

- You must contact the Banacos Academic Center on Campus to determine potential specific internship accommodations for that documented disability before the internship placement process can proceed. Written specifics of those potential accommodations must be provided to the Practicum Education Staff by Banacos Academic Center before your field placement process. It is very useful to create a collaborative process between the Practicum Program, the Banacos Academic Center, and the student, particularly since possible internship placement sites will require clarity of reasonable accommodations that are being requested as part of the interview and decision process. *It is important to note that accommodations in the classroom may not be accommodated by an internship placement agency.*

Can I do my internship placement at my place of employment?

- Students can request to complete their internship placements at their place of employment. There are specific requirements, including an additional application for an employment-based placement. These requirements can be found in the MSW Practicum Education Manual.

Do I stay in my practicum placement during the break between the fall and spring semesters?

- Students are expected to negotiate practicum placement hours during the semester break directly with their practicum instructor and in consideration of client and internship site policies and obligations. Students are encouraged to collaborate with their

faculty practicum liaison regarding any uncertainty about internship placement during the semester break.

I saw something in the Practicum Manual about “readiness for practicum” ... what does that mean?

- Students in the MSW Program will generally be considered to be ready to enter practicum at the scheduled time for their chosen sequence of study. The social work faculty recognizes that all students come to the internship experience with some areas of strength and some areas that need further development. Students are not expected (and should not expect) to be expert practitioners at the beginning, or the end, of their internship placement experiences. However, it is the responsibility of the Social Work Department, the Practicum Education Program, and each student in the program to make sure that students do not enter their practicum until they have achieved the level of knowledge and skill that is required for the protection and promotion of client, agency, and student well-being. For this reason, the Practicum Education Program may, upon occasion, recommend that a student delay entering the practicum education portion of the MSW Program. The Practicum Education Manual discusses in detail the potential reasons and circumstances that may result in a student not entering the internship at a particular time in their education.

I have some legal issues from my past. Will that keep me from getting a practicum placement?

- Many human service organizations are required to perform criminal background (CORI) and Sex Offender Registry checks and use the results in making decisions regarding acceptance of students for placement. In addition, Protective Service agencies will check whether student applicants have histories of involvement with Protective Services. Your practicum application

will ask you about these kinds of situations and it is crucial that you work closely with the Practicum Education Program and that you understand your available placements may be limited.

I have some concerns about immunizations and/or drug tests. Will that keep me from getting an internship placement?

- Many organizations require students to provide proof of immunizations (including COVID-19 vaccination) and additional requirements regarding medical clearances and/or drug screens before acceptance. Your practicum application will ask you about these kinds of situations and it is crucial that you work closely with the Practicum Education Program and that you understand some placements may not be available.

I still have questions after reading this FAQ document. What should I do?

- Much more detail is available in our Practicum Education Manual. You are expected to review this manual in full before applying for practicum and throughout your participation in an internship. You can also view the Practicum Application and Employment-Based Practicum Application at the same site. Please note that these documents and manuals are updated at least annually, so you are advised to always ensure that you are reviewing the most recent version (all versions are dated).

The link is: <https://www.westfield.ma.edu/academics/social-work-department/field-education>

You are always welcome to be in touch with a member of the Field Education Staff:

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