What is Field Education?
Field education, or the field placement, is the social work term for “internship” or “practicum”. Students are placed in human service organizations to develop their professional social work skills and receive academic credit for their experience. Almost one quarter of a Sacramento State University social work student’s academic program is devoted to field education. This fact underscores the high importance social work education places on the field experience.

The social work field experience is characterized in these ways:
- It is an educationally-driven experience, based on a Learning Agreement, using a professional setting as a “classroom”.
- The student’s educator-in-the-field is a professional MSW-level social worker with at least 2 years of post-masters experience in social work.
- The purpose of the field experience is to develop social work skills, not to train students for a particular job.
- The student’s field placement is overseen by a university-based faculty (Faculty Liaison), usually the practice professor, who acts as a monitor and resource for both the student and the field instructor.

What are the agency’s key responsibilities towards students?
The agency must provide the following:
- A sufficient number and variety of assignments to support the progression of student learning as outlined by the Learning Agreement.
- Adequate workspace and access to telephones, computers, records, etc., to fulfill the requirements of the agency and Division of Social Work (the Division).
- Reimbursement for expenses involved in rendering agency services, including mileage reimbursement.
- Release time/support for the field instructor so that s/he can meet the Division’s criteria for working with a student.
- Coverage of any costs related to criminal background checks.

What basic qualifications must an organization meet to become a field site?
To qualify as an approved field site, an organization must:
- Be recognized by the State of California as a corporate entity. It can be private or public, nonprofit or for-profit. Sole proprietorships are not eligible to take students.
- Engage in activities that fall under the purview of the social work profession.
- For the MSW student, the agency must provide a person with a MSW degree, and 2 years post-degree experience, to provide field instruction. For the BSW student, the agency must provide a person with either a MSW or a BSW degree, and 2 years post-degree experience.
- Have written operating policies and procedures regarding discrimination and sexual harassment, and policies and procedures regarding health and safety.
- Be administratively and financially sound.
What is the length of a field placement?

Undergraduate students and MSW I students spend two days per week in the field. Undergraduate students are usually in field Monday and Wednesday or Wednesday and Friday. MSW I students are in field Thursday and Friday. MSW II students are in field three days per week – Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. These days are based on the students’ class schedules but can be changed if mutually acceptable to the student and agency. Students expect to spend two 8-hour days at their placements or four 4-hour days. Placements begin the second week of instruction and continue until mid-May over the course of 32 weeks. Students take a two-week break from field the latter part of December, and are back in field the first week of January.

Who supervises the students in their placements?

For the MSW student, the agency must provide a person with a MSW degree, and 2 years post-degree experience, to provide field instruction. For the BSW student, the agency must provide a person with either a MSW or a BSW degree, and 2 years post-degree experience. This person is called the field instructor, and may be a regular employee of the agency, or a person from the outside with whom the agency contracts to provide weekly field instruction. Over the course of an academic year it is expected, on average, that field instructors will spend approximately 3 hours per week in the training of a student. A portion of these 3 hours must be individual instruction (the “instructional hour”). Students are not allowed to pay for their field instructor’s services; this is an agency responsibility. In addition to the field instructor, the agency may also provide a student with a Task Supervisor. This person is not required to have an MSW, and is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the student. Students must have a Task Supervisor when an off-site field instructor is utilized.

What is the role of the field instructor?

Field instructors are agency staff members or contractors, who possess a MSW and who, with the approval of agency administrators and the Division, are willing and able trainers of social work students. Field instructors are considered adjunct faculty. Their dual role as a staff member and an adjunct faculty member of the Division makes their responsibility unique and demanding.

Field instructors carry out 3 different roles relative to each student:

- They are educators, teachers, and gatekeepers. As an “educator”, they guide and assess the overall professional development of the student.
- As a “teacher”, they facilitate “learning opportunities” for students, model for and observe the student, and provide meaningful feedback.
- as a “gatekeeper”, they assist the Faculty Liaison in assessing whether or not the student is appropriate for the profession--demonstrates the personal/professional capacities/behaviors requisite of professional social workers.

What are the specific responsibilities of field instructors? These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Provide, on average, 3 hours of training/instruction per week that includes, but is not limited to, the “instructional hour” observation, modeling, reading case notes/charts, reviewing process recordings, and so on.
- Provide time for reading student materials, holding informal conferences and meetings, and consulting with Faculty Liaison.
- Use recordings as a teaching tool in individual conferences.
- Develop a written educational contract with the student.
- Provide appropriate assignments for the student throughout the placement.
- On an ongoing basis, assess and provide feedback to students regarding their social work skills, professional behavior/identity and to provide written evaluations consistent with the Division’s calendar and deadlines.
- Conduct a formal written evaluation of the student at the end of each semester.
- Complete an evaluation of the Faculty Liaison using the form provided by the Division.
- Participate in a 6-hour “Introduction to Field Instruction” and, thereafter, “refreshers” once every 3 years.

**What is expected of field instructors who are off-site?**
Field instructors who are off-site are responsible for insuring that the responsibilities noted above are carried out in whole through both their own efforts as well as those of the task supervisor. The off-site field instructor must meet with the student weekly for 1 hour or bi-weekly for 2 hours. The focus of these meetings is social work content – social work perspective, values, ethics, practice theories, and theories for practice. These hours constitute the “instructional hour”. In addition to the instructional hour, the off-site field instructor must communicate with the task supervisor to obtain feedback on the student’s progress in the area of skill development and must review the student’s process recordings and case notes. Lastly, the off-site field instructor is responsible for completing the student’s evaluation in concert with the task supervisor.

**What is the role of the task supervisor?**
A task supervisor is a regular staff member who is responsible for the day-to-day assignments of the student and the observation and assessment of the skills portion of student learning. A task supervisor is required for an off-site Field Instructor. The individual staff member assuming this role must be approved by and able to work with the field instructor of record. It is expected that the task supervisor will model skills and observe the student in his/her daily assignments, meet with the Faculty Liaison as appropriate, and provide relevant feedback to both the student and the field instructor.

**How are students assigned to their placements?**
Undergraduate and MSW I students are assigned to their placements by Field Director depending on their residency location, human service experience, service area of interest, and individual readiness for field. MSW II students choose their placements. Some agencies wonder why MSW II students have not been placed with them during a given year. The answer is that their agency was not requested by a MSW II student during the application process. Many second-year students express interest to various agencies at the Field Faire, but when it comes to specifying choices, the agencies have not been requested.

**Is it permissible for students to do their field placement at their place of employment?**
Yes, but only under specific conditions:
- Employees who have been at an agency for a year or more and work at least 32 hours per week may apply for Job Conversion. This type of placement involves the employee assuming new duties 2 or 3 days per week under the supervision of a MSW field instructor who is not the employee’s immediate supervisor. This option is most appropriate in large agencies with multiple sites and service opportunities. Students should not be expected to assume a regular employee caseload in a job conversion experience, but should be viewed as a student and provided with support and learning opportunities similar to non-employee students.
- Students who have worked less than three months at an agency prior to beginning their placements may apply for Job-Related Placement status. The job duties must be significantly different than the student’s prior experience.

In either of these situations, the agency must be willing to allow students to engage in learning opportunities that may be outside of their normal job responsibilities in order to fulfill the Learning Agreement. To obtain approval for employment-related placements, students must submit a separate application to the Field Director who reviews each situation on a case-by-case basis. Applications may be found on the field website at: http://www.hhs.csus.edu/swrk/field/ under ‘Forms’.
What skill level can I expect of Undergraduate, MSW I and MSW II students and what should my placement be able to offer each level of student?

Student skill levels vary within each year of Social Work education. Some undergraduate students can be very skilled, having several years of experience in a human services job setting prior to entering the Social Work major. In contrast, some MSW I students may be “greener” than some undergraduates. When specifying which level of student you are open to having at your agency, it is helpful to think in terms of years of human services experience required, rather than level of education. *If you think MSW I students are appropriate for your site, we encourage you to be open to interviewing an undergraduate student with a comparable background.*

Generally speaking, field opportunities for undergraduate and MSW I students should offer basic experience in all of the objectives of the *Learning Agreement*, with an emphasis on assessment and basic intervention planning. Students at this foundation level need substantial opportunity to shadow seasoned social workers and to be observed by their field instructors. MSW II students should be given more complex client situations, and should be viewed as ending their second year of placement with the skill level of an entry-level MSW. They too, need opportunities for shadowing and being observed, but should be capable of less intense supervision more quickly.

If you feel that your agency would be appropriate for incoming MSW I students who do not attend the Field Faire, since they are not admitted to the program until mid-summer, we urge you to consider interviewing undergraduate students, that do attend. Remember, MSW II students choose their placements. If you limit your availability to MSW II students, you may end up without students being placed with your agency.

**When does the placement process begin?**

The Division of Social Work sponsors an annual event called the Field Faire held in spring semester for students entering field the upcoming academic year. During the Field Faire, first-level graduate and undergraduate students get to meet agency representatives and learn about the array of placement possibilities. Agency representatives have a chance to describe the educational opportunities available through their placements. Students base their service area requests on the information gathered and as an added benefit, this is also a time when Sac State alumni can network with old friends, colleagues and professors.

**What should I expect to do at the Field Faire?**

Agency representatives (maximum of 2 per agency) are seated at tables in the University Union Ballroom. We encourage you to bring written materials (50 copies of brochures, handouts, photos, etc.) table-top displays, a laptop for website navigation or other agency materials to help promote your agency to help students get a better idea of what opportunities are available. Students will browse from table to table, and ask questions of representatives from agencies of interest. Many students come to the Field Faire with a very open mind regarding the type of placement they want. We ask that you be open to all students seeking information from you.

**Can I offer placements to students at the Field Faire? If not, what is the process?**

In fairness to all students, we ask that you do not offer a placement before he/she is officially referred. MSW II students will receive referrals during the first half of March; Undergraduates by the second half of March, and MSW I students, when they attend their Field orientation in July. When students receive their referrals via email, the designated agency contact will also receive an email with the student(s) names. The students will then call to schedule an interview. During or after the interview, you will be asked to complete an *Agency Response Form* provided by the student. We ask the Agency not finalize any placements with the student until after the official referral is sent.
How are students insured while at the placement?
The University provides professional liability insurance on behalf of the student. The University does not provide workers compensation, automobile, or any other kind of insurance. Most students may qualify for some basic healthcare services provided by the University at the Student Health Center. Agencies who expect students to drive their own vehicles as part of their duties should cover students under agency policies. Agencies are strongly encouraged to include students in any insurance coverage offered to other volunteers at the agency.

What do agencies receive in exchange for offering placement opportunities?
In exchange for providing learning opportunities for students, agencies can expect that students will deliver agency services that advance the agency’s mission. However, most students are not competent to do so until their second semester, and even then will require more supervision than a regular employee. Thus, the agency should not expect to utilize students primarily as unpaid staff, but rather, as developing professionals in a learning environment.

Summary
Agencies that provide field placements to social work students are a vital and essential part of social work education. In the great majority of situations, agencies find our students to be a significant asset to their organization’s programs and clients.

MANY THANKS FOR OFFERING OUR STUDENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER THEIR EDUCATION!