Application Policies and Procedures

The application for admission to SOWK 455, Social Work Practicum, is to be completed during the semester prior to enrollment. The application is contained in this manual and on the Department of Social Work’s Home Page.

The Department of Social Work will establish due dates for applications for fall and spring semesters. Notice of the due dates for the application will be posted on the social work bulletin boards and email listserve and announced in SOWK 443, and in SOWK 445.

Application Packet

All typed materials should be submitted in a standard size manila file folder.

The application folder must include:

- A completed copy of the practicum application form. The practicum application is located in the appendix section this manual and on the social work homepage. Please keep in mind this form should be prepared thoughtfully as it will be reviewed by the entire faculty and will be sent to your potential field supervisor. Remember this is a critical step towards building your professional credibility in the practice world.

- Signed copy of the Professional Commitment, Appendix 3.

- A copy of your resume. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the Career Development and Counseling Center (located on the 2nd floor of the Wigley Administration Building) for review of your resume prior to submission with this packet.

- A copy of the signature page from the section on Criminal Background Checks. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.

- A current unofficial copy of your transcript. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.

- A copy of your SOWK 312 evaluation. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.

- A copy of your graduation plan and its approval from the registers office. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.
Students should maintain their own file of practicum forms submitted, correspondence with practicum coordinator and potential practicum sites, and meeting notes.

Application Review Process
The practicum coordinators review all applications and make recommendations regarding all applications to the Department of Social Work faculty who then discuss the applications and recommendations. Faculty will make decisions regarding each applicant's retention in the program and admission into practicum. The applicants will receive timely and confidential written notification of the Department's decision. The applicants may receive the following response:

- The applicant is retained and accepted into practicum.
- The applicant is retained and conditionally accepted pending satisfactory completion of required course work or other stipulated requirements. An explanation regarding this decision will accompany the response.
- The applicant is retained, but delayed for acceptance into the practicum due to special circumstances. An explanation regarding this decision will accompany the response.
- The applicant will not be retained in the program and is denied practicum admission. An explanation regarding this decision will accompany the response.

Practicum Placement Procedures
If students are not admitted to SOWK 455, Social Work Practicum, they will stop the process at this point and meet with the practicum coordinators, their advisor, and the Department chair as needed for clarification, additional instructions, or re-direction.

Students admitted to SOWK 455, Social Work Practicum, should note the following paragraphs are presented sequentially and include steps for the student and the practicum coordinator. Compliance to this sequence of steps is critical. Students must adhere to this process if they intend to begin their practicum in a timely fashion. Appendix 2 is a checklist provided for students to track their progress.
1. Initial Meeting - Students will be notified SW 443 and SW 445 of the date and time of a mandatory practicum informational meeting. **Missing this meeting will delay the placement process.** If it is impossible to attend this meeting for any reasons, please notify the practicum coordinators as soon as possible.

- The purpose of this meeting is to review the placement processes and procedures in detail, discuss the placement opportunities, respond to any questions or concerns the students may have, and formally begin the placement process.
- The necessity of timeliness in one’s effort, possible placement opportunities, appropriate dress, the liability insurance requirement, background checks, NASW membership, brief information about licensure issues, safety, and roles and responsibilities will be discussed.
- At this meeting students will be given specific direction on the steps to meet the Department of Social Work’s requirement for professional liability insurance. This may be purchased through a private insurer, National Association of Social Workers, or Minnesota State University, Mankato.
- Electronic permission for registration for SOWK 450, Integrative Seminar, and SOWK 455, Social Work Practicum, will be given by the practicum coordinators. The Department secretary will enter electronic permission to register. If the student has completed all the requirements, has attended the orientation meeting, and is still unable to register, the student will check with the practicum coordinators.

2. Selecting Possible Practicum Sites – Students are asked to think carefully about their learning goals as they begin to consider practicum opportunities. Applicants may look at the database for practicum sites before or after the mandatory meeting. The database is located in the social work office or by contacting the practicum coordinators.

- Do not contact any of the practicum placements without prior permission of the practicum coordinators. This is the responsibility of the practicum coordinators.
- Students will be asked to provide the practicum coordinators with a list of their top five choices for placement (including any new placements) they believe will meet their learning goals. The practicum coordinators may have additional suggestions or information that may impact the site selection.
• If the placement that the student desires is not on the database, the student must discuss this with the practicum coordinators. Possible new placement sites are explored and added to the roster each semester. Students are invited to provide agency name, telephone number, address, and contact name, if available, for any new site they would like to have explored.

• Placements are made within a 150-mile radius of MSU, M. Placements outside that radius should be discussed with the practicum coordinators two semesters prior to senior placement. The student requesting such a placement should also understand there may be additional financial responsibilities regarding transportation to SOWK 450, Integrative Seminar, and for the practicum coordinators to make site visits.

3. Initial Agency Contact - From the list of top choices, the practicum coordinators will contact the agency and determine if they are interested in a practicum student, whether appropriate client contact to meet the educational goals of the student is available, supervision, space, etc. is available within the agency.

• If it is a previously unused agency the practicum coordinator will make a site visit to orient the agency personnel to the Department of Social Work’s requirements for student placements.

• If the agency is interested and can provide the required supervision, and student appropriate tasks and assignments are available, the student will be notified.

4. Cover Letter of Introduction - The student will prepare a generic cover letter of introduction to be mailed to potential placement supervisors along with a copy of the students' practicum application and resume. (This does not include the student’s transcript or 312 evaluation).

• All cover letters will be approved by the practicum coordinator prior to mailing. A copy of this letter will also be submitted to the practicum coordinator to be kept in the students file.
• Strict attention should be paid to correct grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and content. (Students have lost placement opportunities based on poorly constructed letters of introduction.)

• Students may also be asked to revise their resume and application if the practicum coordinators believes that it is in the student’s best interest.

• The cover letter of introduction should include the following:
  o Students’ letter head with address, phone number and email address
  o Contact person, agency name and address, date
  o Salutation – use appropriate address (Mr., Ms, Mrs., Dr., etc.)
  o 1st paragraph – introduction of the student and their interest in the agency
  o 2nd paragraph – strengths the student has that will benefit the agency from volunteer experiences, previous placements, job related skills and social work knowledge, values and skills (that are not already listed on the student’s resume).
  o 3rd paragraph – student thanks the agency for their interest and states the student will call to set up an interview within the next week
  o Close with signature
  o Add enclosures section (Enclosures: resume, practicum application)

• Agencies may also require that students complete agency volunteer applications, submit to an additional background check, or submit to required medical tests.

5. Submitting Material to the Agency - When notified that an agency is willing to be a practicum site, the student will forward, by ground mail, a copy of the practicum application, resume, and the cover letter revised to describe the student’s interest in that specific agency or the population they serve.

  • Students will follow up with a telephone call to that agency within five working days to set an appointment for an interview. It is the responsibility of the student to schedule the interview – only on rare occasions will the agency call you.
  
  • Agency personnel will be aware that you are sending materials. Delays may impact their continued interest in hosting a practicum student.
6. **Communication with the practicum coordinators** - The student will report to the practicum coordinator the date and time of the scheduled interview and apprise them of the outcome of the interview. In some cases agency personal may also call the practicum coordinator with feedback.

- Students may interview at more than one agency, however the competition for placements exists not only with one’s student colleagues from MSU, M but also from other colleges and universities. This can be particularly important to keep in mind in the urban areas.

7. **Finalization of the Practicum** - Students will send a thank-you letter to the each interviewer regardless of the outcome of the interview. If the placement interview goes well and all parties (practicum coordinator, student, placement site) believe this will be a mutually beneficial field placement, a letter of acceptance of the placement is prepared by the student for the practicum coordinator’s review. The student should once again make sure the practicum coordinator reviews this letter prior to it being sent.

**Placement Considerations**

Keep in mind that placement is a negotiable matter between the student, the practicum coordinators, and the agency. The placement is based on the student's practice interests, educational goals, and the availability of agencies that are able to assist in meeting these goals.

Agency designees have the authority to accept or decline to accept a student for placement within their agency. This decision is based on information the agency designee has about agency availability, the information provided by the student and the practicum coordinator, and the interview between the student and agency designee. The student also has the right to accept or not accept any invitation for placement from an agency. The practicum coordinators have the final authority for approval of all practicum.

The Department of Social Work requires that students be placed in agencies where supervision will be conducted by a BSW/MSW credentialed supervisor. They may or may not be licensed. The supervisor is expected to have at least three years practice experience in social work and at
least two years at the current agency. All new sites will receive an orientation visit that will include a discussion of the policies and procedures of the Department of Social Work before students begin placement.

**Interviewing Policy**

The Department holds the right to deny the student entering into SW 450 and SW 455 if the student has three failed placement interviews. If the student has attended three interviews with potential practicum supervisors and been denied a practicum at all three of the agencies, the Department will meet to discuss appropriate next steps to be taken with the student.
Appendix 1

Timeline for completion of placement steps

✓ Practice II and Practice III must be completed. A grade of “C” or better in any social work required course is necessary. Any In Progress (IP) or Incomplete (IC) grades must be resolved by the last day of the semester before practicum is scheduled to begin.

✓ If admission to practicum was conditional, the student must supply the practicum coordinators with proof of meeting the conditions by the end of the semester before practicum is scheduled to begin.

✓ Select, confirm, and have approved the placement site by the practicum coordinators prior to the end of the semester before practicum is scheduled to begin.

✓ Proof of liability insurance and NASW membership provided to the practicum coordinator by the first day of your placement.

✓ Proof of background check forwarded to the practicum coordinator by the first day of your placement.

✓ Register for Social Work 450, Integrative Seminar and Social Work 455, Social Work Practicum before the first day of your placement on the University’s MARS system.

✓ Provide the field supervisor a professional letter two weeks before you begin your placement reminding them of the start date and time. Remind the field supervisor that the days of practicum are Monday-Thursday, 7 1/2 to 8 hours per day with Friday reserved for classes. Provide the practicum coordinators with a copy of this letter.

✓ Submit the signed Memorandum of Agreement form to the practicum coordinators (Appendix 7) during the first week of practicum.

The importance of meeting these time lines cannot be overstressed. Practicum will not begin unless all timelines are met.
Appendix 2

Application Packet Checklist

All materials should be submitted in a standard size manila file folder and should be typed. The application folder must include:

✓ A completed copy of the practicum application form. This should be typed or word-processed. This form is Appendix 4 of this manual or on the social work homepage. Please keep in mind this form should be prepared thoughtfully as it will be reviewed by the entire faculty and will be sent to your field supervisor. This is a critical step towards building your professional credibility in the practice world.

✓ Signed copy of the Professional Commitment, Appendix 3.

✓ A copy of the signature page from the section on Criminal Background Checks (page 20).

✓ A copy of your resume. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the Career Development and Counseling Center (located in the Wigley Administration Building) for review of their resume prior to submission with this packet.

✓ A current, unofficial copy of your transcript. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.

✓ A copy of your SOWK 312 evaluation. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.

✓ A copy of your graduation plan and its approval from the registers office. This will not be sent to your field supervisor.
Appendix 3

Professional Commitment

When students enter practicum they are expected to accept and abide by social work obligations required by the profession, the law, and/or licensing regulations. Students assume responsibility for the liability risks that are inherent in their role as a practicing social worker. Each student must sign this section of the application in order to enter practicum. A copy of this form will accompany materials submitted to the potential practicum field supervisors.

1. I understand that criminal convictions may limit future employment and licensure. Federal and state law governs this. The Department has implemented a policy to require a criminal background check prior to senior placement. If, during the past five years a conviction occurred for a misdemeanor or felony for which a jail sentence could have been or was imposed, please describe these events, in writing and attach to this document. You may need to be redirected to appropriate areas of practice if a conviction creates conflicts with practicum agency requirements.

2. I understand that lapses in professional conduct are governed by licensing regulations and the profession. These are best summarized in Section I, B-3 of the NASW Code of Ethics and the Minnesota Board of Social Work Standards of Practice, which I have reviewed.

3. I understand that the student social worker should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with professional judgment, performance, or jeopardize the best interests of those for whom the social worker has a professional responsibility.

4. I understand that if I have had substance abuse difficulties, an agency may require a signed agreement to refrain from use of alcohol and or other mind altering drugs during the period of the practicum.

I have read the above and understand that any misrepresentation of known, current life stressors that might affect my performance in the practicum, or any related legal problems in my background, could result in academic and/or ethical sanctions. I am at this time able to practice social work, as a student, within the legal and ethical requirements of the profession and the law.

Signature__________________________________Date________________________________
Appendix 4

Minnesota State University Mankato

Letter of Good Standing and Consent Form

Date: ______________________________

The following named individual is a student in good standing and has made application with Minnesota State University, Mankato, Department of Social Work for a Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension Criminal Background Check.

Last Name of Applicant (please print): _______________________________________________________

First Name (please print): _______________________________________________________________

Middle (full)(please print): _______________________________________________________________

Maiden, Alias or Former (please print): ____________________________________________________

Date of Birth: __________________________ Sex (M or F): ______________________________

Month/Day/Year

Social Security Number: (Optional) ______________________________________________________

I authorize the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to disclose all criminal history record information to Minnesota State University, Mankato Social Work Department, 358 Trafton Science Center N, Mankato, Minnesota 56001 for the purpose of Social Work 312, Junior Field Experience, or Social Work 450, Senior Practicum. The expiration of this authorization shall be for a period no longer than one year from the date of my signature.

I, ________________________________ (print name) am signing this in the presence of a Notary.

__________________________________  __________________
Signature of Student     Date

__________________________________  __________________
Signature of Notary     Date

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
358 TRAFTON SCIENCE CENTER N
MANKATO, MN 56001
PHONE 507-6504 (V) · 800 627-3529 OR 711 (MRS/TTY) · FAX 507-389-6769
An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University
Appendix 5

Practicum Application
Department of Social Work
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Prepare this application thoughtfully and neatly. You may enter this format into your computer or download this application from the Department of Social Work's web page. The faculty and field supervisor will review this application. This application is to assist the faculty in determining your readiness for practicum. You must type your response to the questions. Do not leave any questions unanswered.

This application will also assist in making an appropriate match between your expectations, needs, and education goals and the agency in which you may be placed. Remember practicum is not training for a specific job, but continuation of your professional education.

Student's name:

Address:

Permanent address (if different):

Telephone number:

E-mail address:

Faculty Advisor:

I receive the Title-IV-B Child Welfare stipend recipient. Yes or No

Minor or Concentration:

Proposed class schedule during practicum:
1. You will be expected to provide your own transportation to and from your practicum placement. Do you have your own reliable transportation? Yes or No

2. Is there anything that might interrupt your practicum experience over the next semester?

3. Please write a 75-word narrative on your strengths as a social work practicum student. Be as specific as you can (use a separate sheet as necessary).

4. Please write a 75-word narrative on your limitations as a social work practicum student. Be as specific as you can (use a separate sheet as necessary).

5. Please describe your goals for the practicum experience. Be as specific as you can in 75 words (use a separate sheet as necessary).

6. Please describe in 75 words the model of supervision that you require. It may assist you to consider previous supervisors with whom you worked well (use a separate sheet as necessary).

7. Are you now or have you ever been convicted of a felony or any misdemeanor? Yes/No; if yes, when please give specific date(s), conviction, and resolution (use a separate sheet as necessary).

8. Are you or have you ever been known to the protective services division of any county due to a substantiated complaint of abuse or neglect to a child or adult? Yes/No; if yes, when please give specific date(s), specify complaint, and resolution (use a separate sheet, as necessary).