CHAPTER 9: FIELD EDUCATION

Dr. Brown's Retirement Reception 2011

Top Left photo: Dorinda Noble and Karen Brown (emerita)
Top Right photo: Catherine Hawkins, Dave Garber (past faculty), Karen Brown, Mrs. Garber

Middle Left photo: Ted Watkins (emeritus), Mary Tijerina, Anne Deepak
Middle Right photo: Lisa Tobias, Sonya Kraus, Terry Pacheco

Bottom Left photo: Raphael Travis, Betty Watkins, Ted Watkins (emeritus), Jerry McKimmy
Bottom Right photo: Amy Russell, Christine Norton, Karen Knox, Hortencia Garza
MSW Field Education: Making the Connection

How Field Links Curriculum and Social Work Practice

Texas State’s Field program, the signature pedagogy of the program, gives students the opportunity to apply, integrate, and strengthen the learning they have gained in the classroom. The MSW foundation field practicum courses, SOWK 5410 Foundation Field I and SOWK 5411 Foundation Field II, provide the learning forum wherein students are placed in generalist agencies for a total of 500 hours under supervision. Administrative Leadership concentration students perform 600 hours of supervised placement in SOWK 5622 and 5623 Administrative Leadership Field I and II, while Director Practice students, who also perform 600 hours in a supervised agency, take SOWK 5612 and 5613 Direct Practice Field I and II.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY 2.3. —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 practitioner. Professionals have pedagogical norms with which they connect and integrate theory and practice. (4) In social work, the signature pedagogy is field education. The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution 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 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.
Accreditation Standard 2.1—Field Education. The program discusses how its field education program

- **2.1.1** Connects the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practice setting, fostering the implementation of evidence-informed practice.

- **M2.1.2** Provides advanced practice opportunities for students to demonstrate the program’s competencies.

- **2.1.3** Provides a minimum of 400 hours of field education for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for master’s programs.

- **2.1.4** Admits only those students who have met the program’s specified criteria for field education.

- **2.1.5** Specifies policies, criteria, and procedures for selecting field settings; placing and monitoring students; maintaining Faculty Liaison contacts with field education settings; and evaluating student learning and field setting effectiveness congruent with the program’s competencies.

- **2.1.6** Specifies the credentials and practice experience of its field instructors necessary to design field learning opportunities for students to demonstrate program competencies. Field instructors for baccalaureate students hold a baccalaureate or master’s degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program. Field instructors for master’s students hold a master’s degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program. For cases in which a field instructor does not hold a CSWE-accredited social work degree, the program assumes responsibility for reinforcing a social work perspective and describes how this is accomplished.

- **2.1.7** Provides orientation, field instruction training, and continuing dialog with field education settings and field instructors.

- **2.1.8** Develops policies regarding field placements in an organization in which the student is also employed. To ensure the role of student as learner, student assignments and field education supervision are not the same as those of the student’s employment.

Overview of MSW Field as Signature Pedagogy

MSW Field internship (or “field placement” or “field practicum”) is the signature pedagogy of social work education, the experience in which everything students learned in class comes together in practical application. The School emphasizes connecting classroom learning and field learning in dynamic ways. Those faculty who do not formally teach in field still participate in field through working cooperatively with field to have coordinated learning experiences. Furthermore, some classroom faculty have provided pro bono weekly supervision for students placed in rural agencies without experienced MSW-degreed field instructors. This has particularly occurred in the online MSW program, where students living in rural communities with only several thousand inhabitants have no access to MSW-level supervision, since no MSWs live within often hundreds of miles. Offering professional graduate-level internships in educationally underserved communities is a major contribution of the School to public service, reflecting the
School’s commitment to social justice and social change. We are also building a cadre of future supervisors in these rural communities, who can at some point provide excellent oversight for students of the future.

Texas State agency-based field instructors also help bring the vitality and timeliness of social service agencies to the classroom by offering frequent guest lectures and sometimes serving as adjunct teachers. This further enhances the cross-fertilization of knowledge and application.

Field students focus on what the evidence demonstrates as most effective practice in the field setting. They connect practice knowledge and skills with experience. The experience is entirely consistent with the School’s mission to prepare social workers to work with the most vulnerable clients, and our field agencies provide that experience for them. Regardless of whether the student is taking foundation field or concentration field (Administrative Leadership or Direct Practice), a number of policies apply.

Policies and Procedures that Guide Field

The School’s Field Office, with the input of the School’s faculty Field Oversight Committee, develops a comprehensive Field Manual, which is available on the Field Page of the School web site. Students and agency-based Field instructors can secure the information they need on that site. In addition, Field Office faculty visit classes to discuss field as students prepare for placement. All potential field students must attend a pre-registration conference with the assigned Faculty Liaison, as well as a Pre-Field Orientation meeting. New agency-based Field instructors also have access to orientation material on the web site, and they also receive hard copies of the Field Manual when field faculty visit with them in pre-placement sessions prior to the start of placement. Field information, consequently, is easily available to all parties.

Selecting Field Settings. Texas State works with 200-300 different field placement sites across Texas and in other states that allow MSW students to extend and apply their knowledge and skills, though that number is fluid since the Field Office is constantly reviewing existing field sites and recruiting new sites. The agency or site benefits by having students who contribute to delivering agency services and to broadening agency perspectives by sharing their academic learning. Field Office faculty meet with potential placement sites and review agency materials to ensure that the site meets the following criteria.

- The Practicum site’s philosophy of service is compatible with social work’s professional philosophy, values, and ethics, and the site provides a social work service or planning function that relates to improving human services.
- The site’s purpose and function are compatible with the School’s mission curriculum, and the site provides a range of learning experiences consistent with the agency service functions, the student’s learning needs, and learning goals of foundation, Administrative Leadership, or Direct Practice field.
- The agency personnel understand and respect the educational focus of field placement, and support Texas State University’s nondiscriminatory policies and practices, as well as other University policies that apply to field placement.
The practicum site has access to qualified Field Instructors (typically licensed social workers) and will provide release time for Field Instructors to carry out field instruction responsibilities and to attend field-related training and meetings.

- The staff is large enough to ensure that the basic agency program is developed and maintained sufficiently without relying on students.
- Sites are able to provide students with suitable work space, communication equipment, supplies, agency-related transportation reimbursements, clerical support, and access to confidential interviewing areas. The site also is willing to provide reasonable measures, such as safety training and policies to handle emergencies, to protect students’ safety.
- The agency agrees to work cooperatively with the Field Office to meet educational goals and to support students in completing their written field seminar assignments and projects. The agency also agrees to alert the Office of any agency changes that affect students and field supervision.
- When the agency is located out of Central Texas and will potentially serve online MSW students, the Field faculty visit the agency prior to or early in the student’s internship.
- Once the agency and the Field Office agree that all criteria are met, the agency and the University execute an Affiliation Agreement between the School of Social Work, the College of Applied Arts, and the Practicum Site. This agreement is updated regularly. Students are not placed in an agency until this Affiliation Agreement is in place.

Selecting Agency-Based Field Instructors. The Field Office carefully examines the credentials of agency-based field instructors, and potential instructors must submit a Field Instructor Profile and vita for consideration. Our graduate field instructors hold the MSW from CSWE-accredited programs, and the vast majority are licensed social workers. All our field instructors have more than two years of practice experience. Those who supervise Administrative Leadership (AL) or Direct Practice (DP) students in field have substantial practice experience that supports their ability to guide students in either AL or DP.

The agency-based field instructor is responsible for the student’s learning activities in the agency, selecting appropriate activities for the student and overseeing the student’s work. Therefore, the agency-based field instructor must be well-qualified and willing to orient, teach, and supervise the student, providing a professional role model. The field instructor must agree to meet with the student for one hour per week of supervision, planning and evaluating the student’s work. The agency-based field instructor also submits mid-term and final written evaluations on forms that the Field Office provides; these forms incorporate the School’s competencies and practice behavior for the field experience. These evaluations provide the framework at a three-way mid-term and final evaluation conference between the Field faculty, the agency field instructor, and the student, at which all parties discuss the student’s progress, accomplishments, and areas in need of professional development. The agency-based field instructor also commits to informing the Field Office timely of any problems that emerge in the placement experience, so that these issues can be handled appropriately.
Using Off-Site Instruction. The School believes that our mission to prepare students to work with the most vulnerable populations compels us to assist students who are committed to working in underserved rural communities. Often there is no qualified MSW field instructor in small communities like Flatonia, Texas, though there may be a BSW-degreed social worker with experience in the area who can provide on-site direction (as well as a social work perspective). We may also wish to seize the opportunity to use a placement setting, such as a legislative office, in which there is no social worker on site.

In these uncommon cases, the Field Office names an On-Site Preceptor who can provide oversight to the student regarding agency or site functions and procedures, as well as helpful resources and networks in the geographical or functional area. The On-Site Preceptor supervises the student’s daily work activities.

We always ensure that the student has a qualified MSW-degreed and experienced Field Instructor of Record, and that this instructor provides a minimum of an hour per week of educational supervision, thereby giving the student a social work perspective. Educational supervision can take place via computer Connect sessions, in which the parties meet in real time, see each other on the computer, and talk via computer as if they were in the same room.

A benefit of this strategy is that we are building up the ranks of qualified MSW-level supervisors in rural areas who can work with future students.

The Off-Site Instructor and the On-Site Preceptor must work as a team with the student to create and refine the Educational Contract, with its learning objectives and tasks, and to assess the student’s learning and work progress. The Off-Site Instructor takes primary responsibility for submitting written evaluations as required by the Field Office, and meets with the Field Faculty Liaison. This strategy, though it requires cooperation, has successfully created non-traditional and rural placement settings for students.

Placing Students in Field. Once a student has completed all necessary coursework and applied for field, the Field Office faculty review and assess the application, ensuring that the student meets all requirements to be admitted to field. Field faculty personally interview each applicant to discuss the student’s learning needs and career goals. Particularly with online students, field faculty also explore the student’s understanding of his/her own community and area agencies. Field faculty also sometimes communicate with faculty at other schools of social work who may have had experience with particular agencies in communities outside Central Texas.

Faculty then designate approximately three appropriate agencies that potentially match the student’s needs, and the student sets up face-to-face interviews with the agency-based field instructor. Field faculty and agency field instructors then confer, and the Field faculty make the final placement decision, matching students with agencies. Students do not make unsolicited approaches to field placement sites or attempt to create their own placement; the Field Office makes all placements. If the agency requires a criminal background check or drug test, the student must comply with agency policy prior to actual placement.
Monitoring Field Placements. Texas State School of Social Work commits itself to being very engaged with placement students and their agency-based field instructors. The School’s philosophy is that overseeing the field placement learning regime is a specialized activity which requires both commitment and understanding of applied learning. Faculty who are interested in and skilled at working with field learning are assigned field courses, which means they work with the field process from placement decisions through teaching integrative field seminar to dealing personally with the placement field instructor and agency. They work under the direction of the Field Coordinator. These faculty are our Faculty Liaisons.

The Faculty Liaison, after helping to create a student-agency-field instructor partnership that best meets the student’s learning needs, is responsible for creating a cohesive learning experience that maximizes the benefits for all partners. To create this experience, the Faculty Liaison must use excellent communication skills. The Liaison combines face-to-face contacts with web-based and other technological communication to ensure that placement is progressing and that any problems are addressed timely. The School will provide web-cameras and microphones to agency field instructors if that strategy helps smooth communication.

The Faculty Liaison typically has at least three conferences per semester with the student and field instructor, and often has many other conferences with the parties. At these conferences, the Faculty Liaison helps craft and refine, as needed, the student’s Educational Contract. The Faculty Liaison also ensures that the agency-based field instructor executes midterm and final student evaluations, and assigns a final grade for the course. The Faculty Liaison helps the agency-based field instructor to understand the School’s competencies and practice behaviors, and how those are frameworks for our educational efforts.

When students are placed in remote settings, we modify this visitation schedule as needed. We have educated students at U.S. military bases in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Guam. We have not personally visited these placements outside the U.S., but we have visited via Connect sessions (face-to-face via computer camera, real-time, speaking on computer microphones). For students placed in other states, such as Minnesota, California, or North Carolina, our Faculty Liaisons have made at least one trip to those sites to visit personally. When students are placed in areas of Texas outside of Central Texas, we visit 1-3 times per placement, even though that visit may require traveling hundreds of miles from San Marcos to communities like San Angelo (247 miles), Odessa (377 miles), Laredo (206 miles), or Wellington (444 miles).

Occasionally, because of a change in agency circumstances or the student’s life events or other considerations, a placement does not work well. In those cases, the Faculty Liaison, with input from the student and field instructor, is responsible for determining the problems and their causes, assessing how to make needed adjustments in the placement structure or processes, or making a change in the placement, all in consultation with the Field Coordinator. In those rare cases when a student’s behavior necessitates termination from field, the Faculty
Liaison, in concert with the Field Coordinator, works to handle this situation professionally with the student and the agency.

**Field Seminar.** As the faculty of record for the field course, the Faculty Liaison is responsible for teaching the field seminar, engaging students, directing conversation, presenting specific materials, and guiding students in developing their assignments in seminar. These assignments involve case assessments, case recordings, and integrative papers and projects. Learning activities explore best practices in the field (as demonstrated by professional evidence), and emphasize social work values and ethics in practice. Concentration field students work on specific, focused projects related to their fields, which they present at the Research Forum at semester’s end. The Faculty Liaison gives direction and helpful feedback on all these activities.

Another growth activity of field seminar is the opportunity to learn from one another, sharing and contrasting field experiences as well as agency missions and procedures. On-campus students often seem to gravitate toward groups of field students who are in similar kinds of service areas. Online students, however, typically meet seminar using TRACS (the University web-based learning system), through focused weekly discussion forums. From time to time, depending on time zones, seminar will meet in real-time using Connect sessions. Online discussion boards are very active, and mean that all students read postings and threads about all field experiences, even those that are quite different from their own. Online students, consequently, arguably are more widely and broadly exposed to all their colleagues than some on-campus students, who may not choose to take full advantage of the cross-fertilization opportunities that field seminar offers. Even online students, however, tend to develop more involved discussions with colleagues who are in similar settings, such as hospitals or schools, in other communities. That is human nature.

**Evaluating Field Placements.** Not only is the student evaluated in field, but the student, agency field instructor, and Faculty Liaison also formally evaluate the entire field experience through the Mid-Term and Final Field Evaluations. Students provide feedback to their agencies and field instructors at the end of the experience, and field instructors provide input about student preparation for field, and about the field courses. The information emerging from this evaluative process is important for the Field Office to continue to refine and improve its process and content.

**Training and Dialogue.** Agency-based field instructors are critical partners in our educational enterprise. The School greatly values their input. The Field Office provides instructors with field orientations and free, innovative trainings (two-three times a year) on a number of topics, such as ethics, supervision techniques, problem-solving, and other knowledge which helps them be effective as field educators. The Field Office is developing more web-assisted trainings for field instructors on a broad range of useful topics. Field instructors may earn up to 5 Continuing Education Credits per semester. Field instructors also receive a comprehensive Field Practicum Manual that informs them about how Texas State School of Social Work organizes and sequences its curriculum, and
identifies practice and evaluation goals for field practicum. And Faculty Liaisons are always available to consult with the field instructors.

We ensure that online field instructors have access to these trainings. The Field faculty meet with these online field instructors at length, either in person or electronically, to discuss our mission, our Field procedures, answer questions, and ensure that instructors have all the contact information they need about field faculty and liaisons as well as other field agencies. The Field Office’s growing library of online CEU modules on issues such framing measurable goals and devising ways to accurately measure achievement are particularly helpful to remote field instructors.

Beginning in 2009, the Field Office sponsors an Annual Field Fair. This well-received event brings field instructors and agency personnel together with students. Agencies can recruit volunteers at this event, such as pre-major students in SOWK 2375 Social Services in the Community, who do a 50-hour volunteer project. The Fair is a forum for people to meet and network. Agencies in remote areas are welcome to provide explanatory materials, send representatives, or participate through Connect.

The School also solicits ideas from instructors to enhance our curriculum and make it more timely and applicable. The Field Office, for instance, ran a series of focus groups with instructors to help the School learn which competencies and practice behaviors our BSW graduates most need to know in order to be successful in the current work world. In fact, the School’s first group to approach with requests for input on curriculum is the field instructor cohort. They provide the link between practice and education that helps the School keep curriculum and policy contemporary and appropriate for the changing landscape in social work practice. And, not infrequently, faculty ask field instructors to speak to our students in various classes about current practice.

**Placement in the Student’s Employing Agency.** Though the School’s policy mandates that students complete their practicum at an agency where the student is not and has not been employed, occasionally an employed student may formally request in writing to complete placement in the student’s employing agency. The School typically will do this only if there is no other viable placement choice for the student, and if the agency is large and complex enough (such as the public child welfare agency) to allow the student to be placed in a different service area under different qualified supervision. The plan for such a placement must be in writing and must be approved prior to placement.

The employing agency must have a social work focus, must agree to give the student release time to complete placement in the different area of the agency, and must construct field work assignments to ensure that the student gets qualitatively new and challenging educational content in the placement agency. The student’s field instructor must not be the same person who supervises the student on the job. This type of placement arrangement is an exception; a student is not allowed to do more than one placement in his/her place of employment except in rare cases when the student works in different areas of a large urban agency where the student has new learning opportunities.
The placement is always driven by the student’s learning needs. We allow placement in an employing agency only when we can ensure that those learning needs are met. Here are some examples of this arrangement:

- Our IV-E students who are employed in public child welfare will typically move to a completely new Unit of the Department: Seasoned investigators will move to a Family-Based Support Services Unit; students who work in foster care will move to a more specialized service, such as Drug Court; or students who work in adoption units may move to the agency’s central office to complete their AL experience in setting, overseeing, and evaluating policy.

- Within our public mental health agencies, such as Tropical MHMR in the Valley between Texas and Mexico, employed students may move from mental health services to developmental disability services, with completely different staff, job functions, clientele, and learning opportunities.

- Likewise, we have had quite a few Communities in Schools staff matriculate through our program. They can get a fresh perspective by moving to a different campus for field, or take new responsibilities with a collateral agency on their own campus (such as working in the specialized program that serves pregnant and parenting teens, or an Alternative School program for troubled youth on the same campus).

- Students employed in an in-patient hospital may complete their internship in the community with the hospital’s home health or hospice agency with totally new learning and supervision opportunities.

- Sometimes even fairly small agencies can provide good opportunities. Employed students at Hays-Caldwell Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, for instance, have found fresh and dynamic learning opportunities by moving between the Prevention Unit and the Assessment and Treatment Services, each of which has a different MSW in charge.

**MSW Foundation Field**

*Field Hours.* Texas State Foundation (Regular Track) MSW students take SOWK 5410 and 5411 Foundation Field I and II, in which students work a total of at least 500 clock hours in an agency that provides generalist field experiences on a level appropriate for graduate students. The expectations for these graduate students is that they will integrate course work and practical experiences on a level that is more sophisticated and more complex than do undergraduate generalist students. Whenever possible, we encourage students to complete foundation field as a block.

*Generalist Practice in Field.* MSW Foundation students work in generalist agencies in preparation for dealing with vulnerable populations in public agencies. In fact, many of our Foundation MSW students are placed in public agencies, such as public child welfare or public protective services for the elderly. Others are placed in non-profit agencies, such as Communities in Schools, the Salvation Army, child and family agencies, domestic violence service agencies, agencies which work with the homeless, and numerous other agencies serving a broad spectrum of clients.
In these agencies, students learn generalist skills, using an eclectic knowledge base that focuses on the strength-based systems perspective in micro, mezzo, and macro situations. Students also integrate developmental theories, understanding of human diversity, and the values necessary for ethical professional practice. Since most of the foundation field MSW students function in practicum settings that provide direct services to client systems, they must know how to interview, conduct assessments and set goals, identify strategies to prevent and ameliorate problems, evaluate their professional activities, lead groups, work with colleagues, and influence policy. They must be able to implement programs and policies, changing them when necessary, and developing new ones. These generalist skills are affected by values, ethics, and laws. Our Foundation MSW students must be able to apply ethical constructs to case situations, as well as to abide by relevant laws. Foundation Field I and II (SOWK 5410 and 5411) students are placed in such agencies as:

- Community-based case management with different populations, such as AIDS services agencies, agencies for homeless individuals and families, and agencies working with people who need employment
- School-based programs such as Communities in Schools, or San Antonio’s Family Support Program, which provide many case management services as well as supportive counseling, crisis intervention, and opportunities for both group and family work
- Advocacy programs serving survivors of family violence, children and families with disabilities, older adults, immigrants and refugees
- Youth leadership and dropout prevention programs such as the P-16 Initiative on campus, Upward Bound, and Dr. Christine Norton’s FACES program (serving college-bound youth aging out of the Foster Care System)

**Integrating Learning in Field Seminars.** Whether on-campus or online, students take an integrative foundation field seminar, in which they, in conjunction with their agency-based field instructor, submit Weekly Logs in their integrative field seminar. This exercise calls for them to specifically link the course content they have learned with the internship experience, focusing on integrating theoretical and evidence-based cognitive material with practice wisdom and experience.

- In foundation integrative seminar, students study how to apply the basic techniques and skills of generalist social work practice (such as observation, data collection, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of interventions). The also explore career options and learn to think of themselves as professionals.
- Students also do a Macro Project (with literature review), which requires them to identify theoretical approaches and best practices in their projects. They must also write a section identifying evidence-informed practice strategies and the evaluation or outcome measures they use in the project. Macro Projects deal with topics such as:
  - conducting community needs assessments;
  - developing and evaluating agency policies and procedures;
  - developing curricula for staff development/orientation/training;
  - developing resource guides for agency staff, volunteers, clients;
  - synthesizing and developing ways to share information;
  - undertaking cost/benefit analyses of programs and services;
Amy was the first Administrative Leadership intern placed with Upward Bound, a youth leadership program targeting at-risk adolescents to help them succeed in college. She conducted research on knowledge, skills, and abilities of staff, which resulted in a new training program for staff that has increased effectiveness.

- conducting exploratory research of new problem areas, unmet needs, or ways to improve agency services;
- streamlining procedures and increasing productivity.

- The Biopsychosocial Assessment assignment also requires students to identify theoretical approaches and best practices in intervention.
- Field seminars guide students in dealing with theoretical approaches they are learning in the agency, and Faculty Liaisons talk with students individually about the connections they are making between classroom learning and agency practice experiences.
- Field students also do an Ethics Paper assessing the ethical dimensions of a case to discuss with other field seminar participants. In fact, field seminar focuses a great deal of time teaching students to negotiate the complex area of ethics and values, and to examine professional ethical codes as well as state regulatory laws. Students are expected to conduct themselves professionally and legally in field.
- Students also complete a Diversity assignment in which they critique their own level of cultural competence, as well as the agency’s cultural competence and any diversity factors that affect service delivery. They are expected to deal with social justice issues, learning how to advocate effectively.
- Grading criteria for field assignments is clearly laid out in the field course syllabi. Students also receive the Field Manual, which gives them a wealth of information about the field process and goals, as well as seminar assignments.
- **Students do not receive academic credit in field or in class for life experiences.** This fact is clearly stated in the Field Manual.
- Field students learn about the social service landscape. In fact, when it is geographically feasible for on-campus students, the integrative seminar often convenes in placement agencies, so that students can get a flavor of different agency settings. In addition to seminar discussion and assignments, they can tour the agency and learn about client resources the agency offers.
- Online students do the same seminar assignments as on-campus students.

## Admitting MSW Foundation Students to Field

To be admitted to field, Foundation students:

- Must have completed their first semester of coursework in the program (for full-time students) or their first year (for part-time students);
- Must officially apply for Foundation internship through the School Field Office of Field Practicum, a process which includes completing the Field Application form, submitting a resume, being academically approved by the Advisor, completing personal interviews with the Field Coordinator or field staff, agreeing in writing to abide by field policies, disclosing any criminal history or special accommodations needed in field, and purchasing professional liability insurance through the School’s designated insurance provider.
- Meet with field faculty to discuss learning goals and needs, personal preferences, and goodness of fit in various types of learning and supervision opportunities.
The field faculty spend a good deal of time and energy working to help each student explore goodness-of-fit issues, such as preferred supervision styles or types of client populations that seem most interesting. We help the student identify the best learning opportunities for him or her.

**Overview of Concentration Field Placements**

*Hours.* Students in SOWK 5622 and 5623 Administrative Leadership (AL) Field, and students in SOWK 5612 and 5613 Direct Practice (DP) Field work a total of 600 hours in the placement agency.

*Selecting Concentration Agencies and Instructors.* In addition to meeting general requirement for field agencies as already stated, concentration agencies must provide advanced and focused services in the concentration. Field instructors must meet all criteria already described, but must also demonstrate experience and expertise in the concentration.

*Admitting Students to Concentration.* Concentration field students take field as their last capstone experience in the program. They must apply for concentration field with the Field Office, going through a similar process as Foundation Field students do. They must have completed all course work with at least a B average. Full-time students complete field as a block placement over one semester, while part-timers and online students typically complete field over two semesters—though they may opt to complete it as a block placement if they can work out their life responsibilities to do so. The Field Office will also work with students and agencies when unforeseen circumstances, such as military deployment, illness, pregnancy, caregiving, or death in the family require a more extended period of time to complete field.

*Nature of Concentration Placements.* The scope of concentration agencies that we use is very broad and is constantly changing as we evaluate existing placements and develop new placement opportunities that offer advanced experiences under advanced supervision. In general, however, Administrative Leadership students do advanced work in such entities as:

- Legislative offices and other policy-making bodies
- State offices of child welfare, services for the elderly, services for the disabled, state health services, etc.
- Administrative offices of Veteran’s Affairs, Red Cross, USO, and family advocacy programs
- Agencies which serve troubled families and children, particularly in grant-funded initiatives or program-planning roles
- Military installations, such as Brooks Army Medical Center, Randolph Air Force Base, and Wounded Warrior Battalion

Direct Practice students complete advanced placement in settings such as:

- State and private in-patient mental hospitals
- Agencies serving those affected by drugs and alcohol
- Prisons and juvenile justice agencies
- Facilities serving people with head injuries and developmental disorders
- Medical hospitals in various programs, such as transplant units, oncology units, emergency departments, etc.
- Hospice

---

Online student Brandy completed her internship in a large non-profit family agency in the Coastal Bend area between Houston and Corpus Christi. She examined archival records of patients age 60 and over and used the results to help the agency develop new mental health services for the “baby boomer” cohort of patients that will be prominent over the next two decades.
Agencies serving families and children

**Integrating Learning in Concentration Field.** To successfully complete concentration field, students must develop adequate knowledge and skills to meet the competencies and practice behaviors which are measured on the Mid-Term Evaluation and Final Evaluation of Field. They must function appropriately as professionals within the placement agency and engage appropriately in integrative field seminar, which is led by the Faculty Liaison. Critical to meeting these requirements is that students integrate their classroom learning with field activities. Field instruction is integral to our social work curriculum. It supplements and extends classroom learning.

Concentration field learning builds on generalist learning, but is also focuses student attention on deeper learning in the concentration. Part of this focus comes through the capstone assignment. AL concentration students complete a major Research Project, in which the student studies an issue or program connected with their field placement and learns more about practice with people in supervision, management, and other macro situations. It can be a needs assessment, exploratory study, program evaluation, study of ‘best practices’, evaluation of new initiatives, enhancement of policies and procedures, or other in-depth research that emerges from the field placement. Students translate their work to a formal poster presentation. DP concentration students produce an Integrative Paper and Poster, on topics growing out of their field placement. This paper is typically a longitudinal and in-depth evaluation of a case, including a social history, multi-dimensional assessment, intervention plan, evaluation strategy, and pertinent issues of diversity and ethics. Their posters present the practice evaluation and outcome measurements of the interventions the client received. This project deepens the student’s understanding of practice with individuals, families, or groups.

**School Research Forum**

Students present their research and posters formally at the Student Research Forum, which the Field Office takes a major role in mounting. The event, which is growing in interest, size, and formality, is attended by faculty, students, field instructors, university administrators, and other interested stakeholders. BSW students also present their research. Online MSW students may either present on-campus during the forum in real time and place, or they can present via Adobe Connect in real time or via continuously-running powerpoint poster-session. Many online students have chosen to travel to campus to present their research at the Student Research Forum, and then participate in the College Hooding Ceremony and the University Graduation festivities.

Students not only present their research, but they also field questions, which is a good learning experience in thinking on their feet. Students also learn from other students’ projects, adding dimensions of learning from people in different geographical areas and people who are providing different services to a variety of client populations. The School is going to offer continuing education credits for this event, and we are considering using a panel of field instructors to rank and recognize outstanding projects.

In Laredo, Ana completed her practicum with the Health and Human Services Commission of the Office of Border Affairs. She conducted a needs assessment of colonias in rural parts of Webb County, particularly addressing hunger. Working with an inter-agency consortium, HEAL (Healthy Eating, Active Living), Ana’s work was critical in developing more effective food banks.