



# VCU

## School of Social Work

### Office of Field Education

## Employment-Based Field Education Guidelines and Processes

### About Employment-Based Field Education:

CSWE Commission on Accreditation (COA) adopted a response to support increased flexibility for students who are pursuing internships through their current employment position. According to CSWE students, field activities and employment tasks may be the same and counted toward required field hours as long as the tasks have clear linkages to the nine social work competencies and their concomitant behaviors.

CSWE states that in order to support a student to use their current employment position towards their required social work internship, the program (VCU School of Social Work) must ensure:

1. The employment-based setting provides opportunities for the student to engage as a learner, applying a social work lens;
2. There are opportunities for the student to fulfill field education requirements (i.e activities that support the development of competencies);
3. Field education supervision of students through a separate qualified agency supervisor.

The VCU School of Social Work Field Education Program posits that it may be possible to tailor a student's current employment position to be utilized as their internship. We believe that if the criteria below can be met by the agency, the student's practice will be enhanced and the agency will benefit from the integration of theory into their current practice. A student/employee is able to delve into the depth and breadth of social work competency development based on their prior organizational knowledge, training, and skill development. Through engagement with a qualified social work field instructor, a student is supported to engage in a more critical and self-reflective practice that is grounded in social work values and ethics and our shared commitments to equity and social justice. Our goal is to ensure the role of the student as a learner while they are engaging in their paid employment position.

Students electing to participate in an employment based field placement are bound by and expected to adhere to all field placement rules and regulations as outlined in the [Office of Field Education Manual](#). Unless explicitly stated in this document, all students participating in field education are held to the same policies, procedures, and sanctions as outlined in the [Office of Field Education Manual](#) and the VCU School of Social Work [Student Policy Handbook](#) regardless of employment status or employment site/location.

### Criteria For An Employment-Based Field Placement:

When students elect to pursue an employment-based field placement it is **their responsibility to manage the process**. Students should discuss the employment-based field placement option and the criteria listed below with their agency representatives prior to beginning this process. To facilitate student learning, **the employer must agree to the following criteria**:

- To commit to a formal partnership with the VCU School of Social Work Office of Field Education by completing the Memorandum of Agreement process.
- To identify a [qualified BSW or MSW field instructor](#):
  - The field instructor must be someone separate from their employment supervisor.
  - The field instructor must be someone employed by the agency.
  - A field instructor for a B.S.W. student is expected to have, at minimum, an earned Bachelor of Social Work degree from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education; and completed two years of post-bachelor's, supervised social work practice.
  - A field instructor for an M.S.W. student is expected to have, at minimum, an earned Master of Social Work degree from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education; and completed two years of post-master's, supervised social work practice.
    - For clinical concentration students, field instructors must have completed three years of post-master's, supervised social work practice, or be licensed as a clinical social worker.
- To commit to the student receiving a minimum of 1 hour of protected weekly supervision from the field instructor, separate from any employment supervision, that supports being a social work learner; and to the understanding that the field instructor will evaluate student performance and demonstration of competencies each semester, separate from any employment supervision.
- To commit to assisting in the creation and support of the learning plan outlined in the proposal form.
  - The learning plan must be developed in consultation with the proposed field instructor.
  - The activities in the proposed learning plan must meet the minimum required number of hours/week based on the student's level of field placement.
- To participate in any data gathering by the School of Social Work to identify program effectiveness.

## **Process for Pursuing An Employment-Based Field Opportunity:**

Students who would like to pursue an employment-based field placement must:

1. Be actively employed at the agency for a minimum of **90 days** when they make an application for an employment based field placement or be employed at the agency for a minimum of **90 days** prior to the first day of the month in which the semester begins. Students entering field education in August, must have started working at their place of employment by May 1. Students entering field education in January, must have started working at their place of employment by October 1. Students entering field education in May, must have started working at their place of employment by February 1. This meets the 90 day criteria seeks to ensure that the student is first acclimated to the responsibilities of their employment, including understanding the culture of the agency.
  - Students must schedule a meeting with the Director of Field Education for consideration of an exception to this policy. Any exception to this policy must be approved by the Director of Field Education.
  - Exceptions will only be considered if the student has yet to be assigned to a field placement.
  - No exceptions will be considered in situations where students have not been hired for employment with the agency.

2. Students must be an employee in good standing. Students on probationary status are not eligible for an employment-based field placement. Students may be asked to provide a letter of this fact to the Office of Field Education.
3. Aim to schedule field hours a minimum of 4 hours at a time to ensure adequate engagement opportunities.
4. Convene a meeting to discuss the employment-based field option and the criteria with, at a minimum, the proposed field instructor and the employment supervisor. Students must ensure the agency is willing and able to support the employment-based field option. Agencies may decline to participate in employment-based field placement option.
5. Complete the field application in Tevera. The employment-based field placement section of the field application asks about agency structure and proposed field schedule, learning opportunities, and supervision. An example is provided below.
  - Field applications must be received on time in order for the employment-based field placement option to be considered. Field application deadlines can be found in the student calendar.
  - Placement Advisors or Field Coordinators will review the submitted employment based information (located within the field application) to ensure that it is fully completed and that the information is accurate and appropriate. Students will be identified by their respective field coordinator if their application is incomplete or lacks sufficient information.
  - The Placement Advisors or Field Coordinators forward the application information to the Director of Field Education or designee for approval.
6. Once approved, students will have two weeks to complete the required preliminary learning plan **with** their field instructor. This plan is submitted in Tevera. An example is provided below.
  - Field Coordinators/Placement Advisors complete an initial review of the learning plan and provide feedback to the student if needed.
  - Field Coordinators submit the preliminary learning plan to the Director of Field Education or designee for final review and approval of the employment-based proposal.
7. Once approved, the Director of Field Education or designee will notify the student and make the formal match with the agency in Tevera. Following the match made in Tevera, the student and field instructor must complete the necessary matching documents in Tevera to confirm the match.
8. Note: The Director of Field Education or its designee's approval of the learning plan is only a **preliminary** approval. Students and field liaisons are expected to meet at the beginning of the semester to finalize the learning plan.

## **Other Items to Know About An Employment-Based Field Opportunity:**

### **Tips for successfully completing employment-based field placement documents:**

- On the proposal portion of the application, students will be asked to provide the credential and contact information of the agency administrator, proposed field instructor, and employment supervisor.
  - Students will be asked to upload an updated copy of the proposed field instructor's resume or CV
  - The agency administrator should be the person at your proposed agency that is responsible for approving the placement of student interns at the agency. Sometimes this could be the proposed field instructor. However, it could also be the Director, Assistant

Director, or an individual who supervises the proposed field instructor, so be sure to check before submitting the form.

- On the proposal portion of the application, students will be asked to provide narrative statements about the agency structure and proposed field schedule, learning opportunities, and supervision.
  - Be very thorough in your responses. Your responses should have enough detail so that all of the questions are thoroughly answered.
  - All of your answers should be in a narrative format.
  - The schedule for your weekly supervision with your field instructor should be definite. They can not still be dependent on anything by the time you submit your proposal.
  - The duties and learning opportunities available to you in the placement should not just be a job description. The placement duties and learning opportunities need to be clearly explained so that it is very clear what new skills, techniques, experiences, etc. you would be getting as a result of being placed there in field.
- When completing the learning plan, remember that tasks should be detail-oriented and tailored to the educational learning opportunities at the agency based on CSWE Core Competencies.
- This is a professional proposal being reviewed by the Office of Field Education, so the organization of your responses, grammar, and spelling matter.

### **Memorandum of Agreements:**

If an agency does not already have a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on file with VCU, the agency must complete the MOA process before a student can be matched to the agency. It is important to note the following:

- A student should not insert themselves into the Memorandum of Agreement process. This is a process that takes place between VCU and the agency.
- A MOA can take up to a minimum of four months to process. This can cause a delay in the field placement start date.
- If the MOA for the agency is not complete within one month of the start of the semester of entry, the Office of Field Education will match the student to an agency based on the information provided in the student's field application. For example, if an agreement with a potential community partner is not fully executed by July 31 for the fall (August) semester, December 15 for the spring (January) semester, and April 1 for the summer (May) semester, the student will be matched to another agency.
- There are implications associated with student's waiting for a fully executed partnership agreement.
  - Waiting for the execution of a partnership agreement may impact the availability of field placement options within the student's area of interest and negatively impact the student's ability to complete the course requirements within the semester. This could result in a grade of "F" for failing to complete course requirements, including the field hour requirement.

### **Employment-Based Changes and Terminations**

- Students are expected to continue their field placement at their agency-indicated site whether they continue employment with the agency or not. Students will not be rematched to another agency based on a voluntary change in employment.
  - If a student is terminated from their place of employment for any reason that violates the NASW Code of Ethics or the School's Technical Standards, the student will be required to follow the termination process as outlined in the field manual.

- If a student elects to voluntarily leave their place of employment, they may not be rematched to another field site. Students are encouraged to consult with their Field Coordinator to discuss the impact that a change of employment may have on their field placement.
- Students are not allowed to change their field placement (site) mid-semester or at the end of the semester regardless of employment status. The commitment to field is for two consecutive semesters.

It is the current practice of the Office of Field Education to have MSW regular standing students complete their field placements at **two separate agencies**. Benefits to this practice are exposure to varying populations, diverse areas of practice and organizational culture, and a variety of intervention modalities. In rare instances, the Office of Field Education will consider a second placement at the same agency if appropriate and necessary for student learning and growth. Therefore, students considering an employment-based field placement for a second time must seek the approval of the Director of Field Education or designee **before** submitting a new Employment-Based Field application.

In seeking to complete the employment-based field placement for a second time, students will need to be placed in a different department of the agency wherein there are appropriate tasks that support student demonstration of the CSWE Core Competencies for the advanced level. The same field instructor may be considered provided they have maintained the appropriate credentials.

## Frequently Asked Questions

- How long does it take to establish an agreement (MOA) with an agency that is not currently in partnership with VCU?
  - A standard memorandum of agreement (MOA) can take up to a minimum of four months to process.
- How long will the Office of Field Education pursue an MOA with an agency which a student has an expressed interest to complete their field placement?
  - if an agreement with a potential community partner is not fully executed by July 31 for the fall (August) semester, December 15 for the spring (January) semester, and April 1 for the summer (May) semester, the student will be matched to another affiliated community partner.
- What happens if I start my employment based field placement late?
  - Students are required to complete all required field placement hours and assignments regardless of field start date. If unable to complete all field course requirements, students may earn a grade of "F."
- What happens if my place of employment is disrupted?
  - If voluntarily disrupted-students are expected to continue at their field placement at regardless of leaving their place of employment.
  - If involuntarily disrupted-this is considered a termination and students must meet with the Director of Field Education to determine if the student is able to remain in the field course. (Refer to the field manual for terminations)