**Puzzled About the Placement Process?**

**A Student Handbook to Demystify the Placement Process!**

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***“Nothing will prepare you more for the "real world" than placement. You can read all the theories, textbooks and listen to your professors for hours, but it will never compare to the learning experience you will have at placement. It is probably your most important experience throughout your social work education”.***

* *BSW graduate*

The school provides experiential education opportunities where students learn from practitioners in human services settings. Students are helped to integrate classroom and textbook learning with real-life practice activities. Placements are in community or institutional settings where social workers engage in direct practice with individuals, communities, and families, or address social issues through community development, policy analysis and development or research.

Field Instructors are social workers who are employed in human service organizations who agree to take on, mentor and support our placement students within their agencies. Normally, they will have a social work degree, at least two years’ work experience and have taken a field instructor course. They are responsible for orienting the student to the placement, co-constructing a learning agreement, providing weekly instruction, supervision, and completing a mid-term and final evaluation of the student. They work closely with the School and the placement agency to facilitate student learning.

## An Overview of Placement Courses and Integrative Seminars - SOCWORK 3D06/3DD6 and SOCWORK 4D06/4DD6

At McMaster, BSW students are required to do two placements, one in each of levels three and four of the program. Each placement consists of 390 hours and involves students going to social work settings where they are instructed by qualified and approved field instructors. The placement is not work-study, nor a co-op, nor an internship, but a course that is guided by educational objectives. Students receive six credits for each of the two placements.

The placement courses, SOCWORK 3DD6 and SOCWORK 4DD6, have a co-requisite, an integrative seminar, SOCWORK 3D06 and SOCWORK 4D06. Students take the integrative seminar and the placement at the same time. The integrative seminars are taught by faculty members in the School who are the seminar leaders. They work closely with the students, the field instructors and the School to ensure that learning objectives are being met in the placement. They help to problem solve any placement concerns and are responsible for grading the seminar and the placement. Students must pass the placement and receive a C+ (6.0) in the integrative seminar. Prerequisites are: SOCWORK 2A06, SOCWORK 2BB3 and SOCWORK 2CC3.

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### Placement Structures:

* For the first placement and seminar, SOCWORK 3D06 and 3DD6, there are two structures:
  + Summer block: runs from May to end of July. Involves 4 full days of placement and one full day of seminar each week.
    - NOTE: Priority for summer block goes to students in the BSW post degree program.
  + Fall/winter concurrent: runs from September to April. Involves 2 full days of placement and one three-hour seminar each week. Most Honours BSW students register in this placement structure.
* For the second placement and seminar, SOC WORK 4D06 and 4DD6, there are two structures:
  + Fall block: runs from September to December. Involves 4 full days of placement and one full day of seminar each week.
    - NOTE: Priority for fall block goes to students who have only these 12 units left to complete.
  + Fall/winter concurrent: runs from September to April. Involves 2 full days of placement and one three-hour seminar each week.

If you are a BSW Post Degree student doing the program full-time, generally you would take 3D spring/summer Block followed by 4D Block or Concurrent in the fall. If you are an Honours BSW student, you will likely take 3D Concurrent in your third year (September to April) and then 4D either Block (September to December) or Concurrent (September to April) in your fourth year.

Block placements are 13 weeks of approximately 30 hours per week (390 hours total). Concurrent placements are approximately 15 hours per week over two terms (390 hours). Seminar classes are held once per week in conjunction with the placement.

## An Overview of the Placement Process

### Mandatory Courses

Students must ensure that they take the following 2nd level courses in the first year of the BSW program (or as soon as possible) as they are pre-requisites for starting the first placement:

* SOCWORK 2A06, SOCWORK 2BB3 and SOCWORK 2CC3

### Placement Orientation

The Faculty Field Coordinator(s) – Janice Chaplin and Jennie Vengris will hold orientation sessions in the late fall/early winter to discuss general information regarding field placements and assist students planning for placement interviews and ensuring students are ready for placement. They will also discuss the types of placements and locations available. In mid-November students will be asked to submit their requests for their preferred placement structure for the upcoming academic year.

### 3D/4D Application

An email asking students to complete a survey to submit their placement structure preferences for the upcoming year be sent out early in the fall. Survey responses will be due the second week of November. This is to determine which students are planning to do placement for the upcoming academic year. Once requests for placements have been submitted and sectioning has been completed, students will receive an email to confirm results of sectioning.

Completing the **Student Information form in Intern Placement Tracker (IPT)**

Once students have been sectioned into the placement structures, students will need to complete the student information form in IPT which is the on-line system students will be using to submit their resume, video, and other information such as areas of interest and learning objectives. Each student will receive a unique log in and password for the IPT system.

### MOSAIC Course Selection

After sectioning has been completed, students will receive an email to request preferences for day vs. evening seminar section. The School will do our best to accommodate preferences but ultimately decides which section a student is placed on based on even distribution of students across section, students placement locations, etc. Permission will be entered on MOSAIC and those section will be able to register for 3D and 4D courses. Registration for fall/winter happens in June according to [Enrolment Dates set out by the Office of the Registrar](https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/dates-and-deadlines/).

### Matching Students with Placements

We have a Faculty Field Coordinator and a Field Developer in the School, who arrange placements for students. WE find the placements for students so that you do not have to! The Field team works with a number of criteria when matching a student with possible placement agencies, including but not limited to: student preferences submitted in IPT, available placements and field supervisors, reports from SOCWORK 2A06 instructors, etc. The goal is to match students with an area and instructor that will be a good fit.

### When a Placement Match is Made

Once the field team has secured a match for a student’s placement, they will reach out via email to confirm the details. The student will then be responsible for reaching out to the agency to set up the placement interview. You will find lots of great information on the placement interview process in the [**Pre-Placement Interview Guide.**](https://socialwork.mcmaster.ca/documents/pre-placement-interview-guide-2022.pdf)

### When a Placement is Secured

Once the interview happens and the student is accepted into the placement, the agency will notify the Field team and the student to confirm the match. The Field Assistant will follow up to confirm the MTCU health and safety and insurance forms that need to be completed by the student and the placement agency.

Students may also need to complete required immunization documents and police checks (as required for the placement) and these will need to be completed in time to begin placement. The School can provide letters for the police check to assist with reducing the cost. Please email Lorna to request this at [oconnell@mcmaster.ca](mailto:oconnell@mcmaster.ca)

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### If a Student is Not Accepted into the Agency Following an Interview

Sometimes a setting will choose another student for the placement or will say that they are unable to offer the student the placement. Sometimes there are changes in an agency that prevents them from offering a placement. This can be very upsetting. Please remember that the pre-placement interviews are attempting to find the best match of student learning needs and style with setting learning opportunities and teaching style. Even when a match does not emerge from an interview, students report that they learn about the agency, themselves, and the interviewing process. Senior students and graduates of the program often say that the pre-placement interviews prepared them for job interviews. If a student is not accepted into a placement following an interview, the Field Team will follow up to discuss the details with the student, provide important feedback and plan for next steps such as an interview with another agency.

### Starting Off in Placement – A Few Notes

During the placement, the student and Field Instructor will be reviewing together the student’s learning objectives and creating a learning plan. The learning plan is really important! It essentially acts as a road map for the placement. The student , field instructor and seminar leader should all be on the same page about the learning plan. That is why seminars review and provide feedback on learning plans. It is important that you work on developing this in the first two weeks of your placement. We encourage you to [check out the video that a faculty member created which explains learning plans!](https://mcmaster.zoom.us/rec/play/T6DTK5pY09eKA0INK9aOLsMVnZjz7Y-W4C0CXs4pD20xX0k3iptoxqucDIJfPTHTQ256Z8ny9-8_e6G_.XZvkX1pUw5eNwk_Z?startTime=1651371786000&_x_zm_rtaid=4maKAisGTEyeAtWsQsbw0Q.1658235731754.d2acd429825b0e0f31c09b566f43882d&_x_zm_rhtaid=597)

The student and Field Instructor will work together on preparing a mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation. These are submitted to the School via the seminar leader. The School keeps them on file for 5 years. They are helpful in preparing letters of reference. The more detail included in them the better so put lots of examples in them! The Seminar Leader meets with the student and field instructor twice per term- to review the mid-term and final evaluations. The seminar leader is also available for additional meetings and support as needed during the placement term.

The Field Manual is a really important document that will assist students and Field Instructors with information needed to guide the placement process, before and during the placement including guidelines for evaluations. [Field Manual](https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/social-work/resources/field-placements/field-practice-manual.doc)

### A Few More Special Notes About Placements

**•**Placements are education-focussed. Like other professional programs (medicine - clerkships, nursing, teaching, physiotherapy, occupational therapy) social work has placement courses. These placements courses are for credit and require instruction from an experienced practitioner in the field. The placements required of Social Work students are educationally focussed. Tasks are designed to reflect learning objectives set out by the student, the agency and the School.

**•Generalist Practice.** To practice social work at the BSW level you need a range of skills. You graduate from McMaster School of Social Work as a generalist not a specialist. You will have the knowledge and skills to function in most social work settings. When choosing a placement, think about what you need to learn and what you want to learn. Focussing on what you need to learn gets you out of the trap of limiting your placement to one population, one modality or one setting. Developing your knowledge through a variety of experiences leaves you better prepared for employment.

•Placements are unpaid. Unlike a work situation, the student is in placement to learn, and the learning objectives drive the learning, not the needs of the agency. Different than an employee, the student is supervised and instructed in their learning.

•Since these are courses, the university charges tuition for both placement and seminar.

•Placements are generally in Hamilton as this is where our community is. We do place some students within 45-minutes of the Hamilton area; we do not offer long distance placements. When we do place students within 45 minutes of Hamilton it is usually because students a live in those areas. We cannot guarantee placements in places like Mississauga or Toronto as many Schools operate in that area and there is lots of competition! So, students should be prepared to complete their placements in the Hamilton area.

•Placements are chosen because of their educational value, their congruence with the School’s philosophy and the field instructor’s qualifications.

•Most placement hours are during regular business hours; consequently, placement hours during the evenings and on weekend are not normally available.

•Part time students should be prepared to allocate 18 hours per week for placement and seminar during the September to April period. If summer or fall block is chosen, students should except to commit 5 days per week for 13 weeks in the summer or fall term.

•Students are expected to assume the cost of travelling to and from field practice agencies and any parking costs.

•Students will be required to undergo police checks and possible medical testing (ex. TB tests) before being accepted into placement and assume the associated costs. Health care placements have detailed immunization requirements.

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* *Former BSW student*

## The Top 10 Things You Should Know about Placements

(From students who have been through the process twice!)

10. Learning objectives are important. They will make more sense when you start placement, and they will help you direct your learning in placement and with your field instructor.

9. Make your learning objectives broad to start and then more specific as you go. Start with broad objectives. Make them a little more specific to the agency when you go for your interview. They will become even more specific once you start placement. For people who have a hard time thinking broadly to start, make them very specific and then find the general themes.

8. Focus on generalist skills and knowledge, not job specific activities or tasks. For example: 'learn about and perform assessments' versus 'complete CAS intake assessment'.

7. Know your passion and interests but be willing to step out of your comfort zone. Use your passion/interest and knowledge from previous experiences in a new setting. Be willing to challenge yourself in a new area/setting.

6. Know your learning style and your learning needs.

5. Reflect about your fears, concerns and reservations and be open to challenging them in this supported learning opportunity. If there is an area/activity in social work that you have reservations about, placement is a great opportunity to grow and learn while you are being supported. Once you enter the work force, you may have to face your discomfort without as much support.

4. Make connections now that will support you through the placement process and placement experience. Make plans for coffee or exchange e­mails with fellow students while interviewing for placements and during placement.

3. Be patient with the process. You will eventually get a placement, so try not to sweat the small stuff.

2. Listen to Janice. She knows field instruction and the process and is a resource.

1. Be prepared for a surprise! You'll be amazed by how much you will learn and grow, and how much fun you can have.

## Field Placement Supports Contact Information

If you have any questions during the placement process, we are available to assist you:

Janice Chaplin: [chaplin@mcmaster.ca](mailto:chaplin@mcmaster.ca)

BSW Field Education Coordinator

Jennie Vengris: [vengris@mcmaster.ca](mailto:vengris@mcmaster.ca)

MSW Field Education Coordinator, BSW Field Education Development

Tammy Maikawa: [millet@mcmaster.ca](mailto:millet@mcmaster.ca)

Administrator, School of Social Work

Lorna O’Connell: [oconnell@mcmaster.ca](mailto:oconnell@mcmaster.ca)

UG & Field Education Administrative Assistant, School of Social Work

[Organizations that Support our Students](https://socialwork.mcmaster.ca/documents/agencies-supporting-student-placements-2022.pdf/view)