

**THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
PRACTICUM PROGRAM**

**The following information is excerpted from the Practicum Manual 2008-2009**

**Employment-based Practicum Placements (EBPP)**

Recognizing the importance of the field practicum in the educational experience of social work students, the field practicum stands as a substantial part of the curriculum and requires that students devote themselves to expanding and advancing their scope of social work practice. Practica must offer students ample opportunities for expanding their experience in social work and for developing the competencies they require to advance in the profession.

The objective of the practicum experience is for students to obtain experience that is different from the experience they can acquire in their current jobs and/or organizational settings and different from experiences they have had in past employment and/or organizational settings.

When special circumstances exist and required policy and procedures are followed, Employment-Based Practicum Placements (EBPP) may be considered relevant options for students who can benefit from educational experiences in the place of employment as long as the employer, supervisor, and student can ensure the following (1) students are offered relevant and challenging social work educational experiences that are different and separate from their actual job responsibilities; (2) the experiences represent new learning; (3) the site offers supervision that is separate and distinct from the supervision the student receives in the actual job site; (4) students can achieve the learning aims of the practicum component of the school; and (5) the job responsibilities of students will not compromise the amount of time they invest in practica and their fulfillment of the teaching/learning agreement.

While there **is no guarantee that requests for EBPP will be approved**, when students are approved for such a practicum, the site, not the OUSSW or the Practicum Program, is responsible for the individual's compensation and benefits while a student fulfills the requirements of practicum. Prior employment or life experience may not be credited toward practicum requirements. Any deviation from standard guidelines is at the discretion of the Practicum Coordinator.

If during the course of the practicum semester it becomes apparent that an approved EBPP does not meet Practicum Program expectations or if the student does not comply with expectations of the course or placement, approval of the EBPP may be withdrawn.

**Guidelines for an EBPP**

**Student requirements and responsibilities**

1. Applications for EBPP will be considered when submitted from students who meet the following criteria:
  - a. MSW students in their final or concentration year of study;
  - b. Foundation year students who have completed or been exempted from the first year of part-time coursework (HBSE I, HBSE II, Diversity and Oppression, and Practice I).

2. In order to insure the investment of the employer in the student's educational experience, student applicants for an EBPP need to document at least six months employment at the practicum site. If the agency or facility has a known history or otherwise demonstrates a commitment to field education for social work students, in exceptional cases, the six month requirement may be waived.
3. The student's performance evaluations must be satisfactory and must be confirmed in writing by the student's employment supervisor. Approval of a placement for a student in a position of authority (eg's. are CEO, director, site administrator) will be granted only if the site has sufficient resources and structure to assure unbiased practicum supervision.
4. Students applying for EBPP must submit a practicum application and EBPP proposal by the established deadline or the proposal for an EBPP will be automatically denied.
5. An EBPP proposal must be submitted if the student intends to complete any portion of practicum in his or her current place of employment even if the student's practicum responsibilities will be significantly different from the work for which the student is paid.
6. The process of approval of an EBPP can take several months and students are encouraged to complete and submit applications early.
7. If a student's EBPP proposal is denied for any reason, including failure to comply with established deadlines, the student will be offered the option of delaying the Practicum until a future semester or accepting an alternative placement that is not employment-based.

#### **Site requirements and responsibilities**

1. The practicum site at which a student proposes an EBPP must have an active formal affiliation agreement with the OUSSW. In cases where a student proposes a placement at a non-affiliated site, the OUSSW **may** pursue negotiation of such an agreement.
2. The site must offer diverse learning opportunities that meet the educational objectives of the student's practicum course. Practicum assignments must be **significantly and qualitatively different** from the student's current and past employment duties, represent new learning for the student, and offer the opportunity to advance the student's knowledge and practice skills. Sites may find it useful to assign a student to a different department, unit, division, or program within the site.
3. The workload of the student in practicum must be significantly less than that of regular employees of the site in order to provide time for application of classroom knowledge, further development of social work skills, and supervision and reflection.
4. The site must identify and appoint an MSW to serve as practicum instructor. This MSW must meet the criteria set by the OUSSW for all practicum instructors. The site must permit the practicum instructor to meet with the student a minimum of one hour per week for supervision throughout the practicum semester. If the site does not have an employee who qualifies or who is available to function in this role, the site may elect to use a practicum instructor from outside the site who is well-grounded in social work education. If financial compensation is necessary in order to provide such supervision, the site, not the student, is responsible for this payment.
5. The student's current employment supervisor may not serve as the student's practicum instructor or preceptor. The assigned practicum instructor or preceptor may not be assigned the role of employment supervisor during the practicum.
6. A work supervisee may not serve as the student's practicum instructor or preceptor.

7. The site must demonstrate knowledge and approval of the student's EBPP through the provision of required signatures on the student's proposal.

### **Practicum Instructor requirements and responsibilities**

1. The practicum instructor must meet the criteria set by the OUSSW for all practicum instructors.
2. The site must agree to use of the MSW identified in the role of practicum instructor.
3. The identified practicum instructor must demonstrate knowledge of and agreement to the student's EBPP through the provision of required signatures on the student's proposal.
4. The identified practicum instructor must be able to distinguish the student's job responsibilities from the student's practicum activities.
5. The identified practicum instructor must not be the person who is currently providing employment supervision for the student nor may the instructor be assigned the role of employment supervisor during the practicum.
6. The identified practicum instructor may not be the student's work supervisee.
7. The practicum instructor must agree to meet with the student a minimum of one hour per week throughout the practicum semester for a formal supervisory conference.

### **OUSSW responsibilities**

1. Practicum faculty will conduct an evaluation of the site prior to use as a practicum site for an EBPP. Emphasis will be placed on determining the designated Practicum Instructor's ability to assist with the development of a Teaching-Learning Agreement which clearly distinguishes employment tasks from educational practicum assignments.
2. Practicum faculty will monitor the placement through visits to the site and communication with student, practicum instructor, and site administration. If through the course of the practicum semester it becomes apparent that the student is not fulfilling the expectations of the approved EBPP as outlined on the approved proposal and Teaching-Learning Agreement, the placement may be terminated immediately.
3. The OUSSW has no obligation to find, pre-authorize, or assure paid placements for practicum students.

### **Procedure for student request of an EBPP**

1. Work with the practicum site to prepare the written EBPP proposal. The written proposal must outline how the site will meet the conditions of the proposed agreement, how the activities of the practicum student will meet requirements of the practicum course and differ from regular employment duties, and how the student's current job duties will be covered while the student is in the practicum. See the EBPP proposal form.
2. Complete and submit all parts of the Practicum Application including the EBPP proposal by the established deadline. All applications and proposals must be submitted before the student meets with the Practicum Coordinator for a pre-placement interview.
3. Include a copy of the student's current job description and a copy of his or her most recent performance evaluation with the EBPP proposal. If the site does not use a formal performance evaluation tool, a letter from the employment supervisor will be accepted.
4. Obtain written agreement of the student's current work supervisor, the identified practicum instructor, and the most relevant administrator, CEO, or his or her designee through signatures on the EBPP proposal. Such agreement may involve the administrator

or department, unit, division, or program director. Signatures indicate that all parties have read and understand all stated requirements and activities indicated in the proposal. No application will be accepted without all required signatures.

5. Assure that the practicum instructor has been approved by the OUSSW to serve as a practicum instructor. To apply for practicum instructor status, the identified MSW must complete and submit the Practicum Instructor Questionnaire and a copy of his or her resume.
6. Assure that the site has an active formal affiliation agreement with the OUSSW. The student may make inquiry with the Practicum Office regarding site status and may assist in the process of securing such an agreement if none exists.

### **Approval process**

All EBPP proposals are reviewed by a faculty committee and all must be approved by the Practicum Coordinator. Students are notified of the status of their proposals within four weeks of the deadline for application submission.