

CHAPTER 3: ACCREDITATION STANDARDS THAT GOVERN FIELD EDUCATION

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the accrediting body for both BSW and MSW social work programs in the United States. It sets forth the educational policies and standards that are intended to advance academic excellence and illustrates the essential educational content and context that offers professional educational preparation of quality. The specific policy that governs field education is drawn from Section 4.7 (also 5) of CSWE Educational Policy and is presented below. The accreditation standards that emerge from that policy are constituted under CSWE Accreditation Standard 2.1. They appear after the educational policy statement 4.7 (5).

Educational Policy Governing Curriculum Content

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. 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.
- 2.1.2 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 field 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 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.

Note that the above standards govern the MSW field hours requirements, student admission criteria, policies and practices with regard to practicum agencies, minimum educational credentials for agency field instructors, requirement for orientation, training, and on-going relations with field agencies, and student policies that establish boundaries around employer/educator aspects of field education.