

Social Work Internship Frequently Asked Questions for Agencies 2025-2026 Academic Year

This document addresses many common questions that agencies have related to social work internships and the internship search process. For access to a comprehensive guide to all social work internship policies, agency personnel are encouraged to review the [Internship Manual](#) available on the Office of Social Work Internships [website](#).

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General Internship Requirements

1. *What are expectations for social work internships?*

All social work internships are designed to allow social work students to apply social work knowledge, skills, values and ethics in real-life practice settings within community-based agencies while being supervised by social workers and, in some cases, professionals from other disciplines. Internship learning opportunities should be related to the core social work competencies:

- Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- Advance human rights and social, racial, economic and environmental justice
- Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion in practice
- Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- Engage in policy practice
- Engage with, Assess, Intervene with, and Evaluate practice with: individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

2. *How do BSSW/MSW Foundation year internships differ from MSW Concentration year internships?*

Student learning must be tailored to objectives related to their specific student level.

BSSW and MSW Foundation year internships offer opportunities for the development of **generalist** social work practice. The generalist experience is designed to orient students to foundational social work knowledge and skills. In the BSSW and Foundation years, students develop a base of core social work knowledge, values, and skills and identify opportunities for exposure at all system levels (individuals, families, groups, communities, and organizations). BSSW and MSW Foundation year students are expected to have opportunities to demonstrate their generalist practice skills of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation, whether this be at the individual level or with larger client systems. Amount and length of shadowing and observation may take much of the fall semester, but ultimately should be determined as needed to support student success as it relates to the agency's work and internship tasks. For example, if this is the first time the student is working with clients or learning about power, privilege, and oppression, these nuances will impact the initial stages of their internship experience.

The MSW Concentration year internship will offer opportunities for the development of **advanced** social work practice. It will focus on more specialized skills, which may be at the clinical, mezzo or macro level depending on student area of interest and career goals. The concentration year internship will also allow for increasingly autonomous practice and more purposeful selection of interventions based on application of advanced theoretical knowledge. Advanced students should be able to exercise more autonomy once on-boarded and trained. Shadowing at the start is appropriate, especially for more specialized/niche practice. Students are more responsible for co-creating supervision agenda and session content.

Another difference between internship levels is that while completing MSW Concentration year internships, Concentration year students will be enrolled in a concurrent two-semester Capstone course. In the Capstone course, students develop and implement a project that is very often linked with the internship agency. There is a range of types of projects which students may identify in consultation with their agency supervisor. Examples of project types may include conducting a program evaluation, writing a grant, developing a program or curriculum to implement, creating a social documentary or more.

3. *How many hours will social work students spend in their social work internship?*

Social work students will be in their internships for two consecutive 15-week semesters commencing with the fall semester in mid-August until the end of the spring semester which concludes in early May. During this time period, they must complete the required minimum number of hours per semester as listed below. Students should not be expected to begin their hours prior to the official start of the fall semester and any agency orientation activities should take into account student course schedules. Completion of the minimum number of hours does not release a student to end their internship before the end of the semester.

BSSW and MSW Foundation Year Students:	Minimum 200 hours/semester (400 hours/year); approximately 13-14 hours/week
MSW Concentration Year Students:	Minimum 250 hours/semester (500 hours/year); approximately 16-17 hours/week

4. *How does scheduling work? Can an internship be arranged for evening/weekend hours?*

Internships are designed to take place when the Social Work Supervisor/Task Supervisor is regularly employed and available for supervision in order to protect the safety of students, clients and other stakeholders. *Note: lunch breaks do not count towards required internship hours.*

Some agencies may require specific training/work hours outside the regularly scheduled business hours for internship. It is up to the student and Social Work Supervisor/Task Supervisor to specify work hours before the internship begins. While certain agencies may have evening activities or other opportunities that allow students to complete their required hours during evenings and weekends, this is not required. At all times, students must have access to their supervisor for supervision and safety reasons. It is up to the student to work with their agency supervisor to arrange their schedule to allow for completion of all required coursework and internship hours.

5. *Can a student start their internship before school starts?*

Internship hours should be spread over the course of each full semester to allow the students to experience the internship in a developmental fashion concurrent with the content of classes (versus early completion of hours). Agencies shall not schedule any mandatory training or onboarding sessions that interfere with student class schedules.

In rare circumstances, internship agencies may require an earlier start date than the first week of classes though no earlier than the start of August. The early start request is not to be at the discretion of the student unless it is related to an accommodation which has been approved by MSU Denver's Access Center. Approved accommodations may be related to a student's documented condition or disability or under Title IX, for students who experience pregnancy, childbirth, health conditions related to pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, and/or recovery. See Section IV. B. 18. "Accommodations" in the [Internship Manual](#).

Any activities that occur prior to an approved start date (no earlier than August 1st) would need to be considered as a volunteer or employment capacity with the agency and not covered by MSU Denver liability insurance. Requests to begin early must be submitted to the Office of Social Work Internships by the student when completing the Internship Confirmation Form prior to beginning the internship. Retroactive requests to start early and accrue internship hours will not be approved.

Requests for early starts must include a rationale for the request of an earlier start date. The only approved tasks for early starts of student internships are participating in agency orientations and other on-boarding or training related activities. Direct practice with clients is not an approved activity for early starts. In cases where this request is approved, students may accrue up to, but no more than, 40 internship hours before the start of the fall semester.

Students who accrue hours prior to the start of the semester are not permitted to 'bank' hours and end their internship early. Extra hours **may** be used to lighten the load during the semester at times **with agency supervisor approval**. However, generally, students are to maintain a steady accrual of required hours throughout the semester. Students are required to be in their internship until the end of each semester.

6. *Will students be required to work over holidays and school breaks?*

Students are not required by the university to be in internship during regularly scheduled university holidays and university breaks. University holidays may differ from agency holidays. In this case, students must arrange their work schedule in coordination with their agency supervisor. Agencies may require a student to complete hours over winter break to ensure continuity of care, however these expectations must be discussed during the initial interview. While students may work extended hours over the winter break, they may not terminate from their internships before the end of the semester. This may mean students will accrue more hours than required.

7. *Are paid internships allowed? If so, what considerations should my agency take into account?*

Yes. As a non-traditional institution with a focus on reducing barriers in higher education, we appreciate when agencies provide students a stipend or other form of compensation for internships. We understand that not all agencies are in a position to offer compensation. Our list of 'agencies who provide a stipend' is one of the most requested lists by students. If an agency offers a stipend (whether hourly or set amount [x amounts each semester/end of month/year/depends on agency]), student interns are not necessarily considered an employee of the agency. However, agencies should ensure that if they are offering students a stipend or paid internship, they are adhering to all the applicable [Labor Law requirements](#). Agencies should provide a written outline of the stipend or payment arrangement to students upon offering the internship. Timely and accurate payment to students is expected. Not following through with the payment arrangement can lead to dissolution of the partnership between MSU Denver and the agency.

Applying for Internships

8. *What is the process for students to obtain a social work internship?*

Students work with an Internship Navigator from the Office of Social Work Internships in the spring, before their internship begins, to identify whether they will go through a **traditional internship search**, in which students apply to up to five potential internship agencies, OR if they would like to **request an employment-based internship**.

- **Traditional Internship Search:** Students utilize the Sonia Database in consultation with their assigned Internship Navigator to assist them in selecting and being referred to agencies. Under NO circumstances may a student interview with an agency without prior permission from the Office of Social Work Internships. The student will then contact each agency for an interview. This is typically done by the student emailing an agency a cover letter and résumé and requesting an interview.
 - To support students' professional development and ability to find a suitable internship, we require agency internship contacts to maintain clear and timely communication about the status of their application materials. Please notify students and the Office of Social Work Internships at SWKinternships@msudenver.edu if your agency's capacity changes and/or once internship openings have been filled.
 - The interview is a two-way process; agencies may offer or deny an internship to a student, and a student may also determine whether the agency will be able to meet their learning goals for a developmentally appropriate internship.
- **Employment-Based Internship Request:** Students may request that their current employer consider an Employment-Based (EB) internship, though any EB internship request is not guaranteed and requires approval from both the employer and the Office of Social Work Internships. When requesting an EB internship, students are provided with a detailed set of instructions because the process is different than applying for a traditional internship. They are directed to first determine if their employer is already an affiliated agency partner with MSU Denver's Dept. of Social Work and, if so, identify the agency's Internship Coordinator (if applicable), as this person will typically need to approve the EB internship request.

The student should discuss their EB request with their direct supervisor, as well as the Internship Coordinator and whomever will serve as the student's Social Work Supervisor.

- Each agency may determine whether or not they allow EB internships and/or whether or not they will approve a specific employee's request for an EB internship. Each agency's Internship Coordinator should familiarize themselves with the [Internship Manual](#) policies regarding EB internships in order to determine whether or not, and if so under what conditions, EB internships will be approved at their agency.
- Agencies are encouraged to consider the student's learning opportunities within their job and/or organization. There are many different ways to structure EB internships, so it is best for the student and agency to discuss openly and collaboratively what the pros/cons might be and what would and work best for each unique situation.
- For additional details, please see the [Internship Manual](#) and/or the Employment-Based (EB) internship FAQs which will be provided to all agency partners at the beginning of the search cycle. Please reach out to the Office of Social Work Internships if you have specific questions and/or would like to request further consultation.
- **Finalizing the Internship:** Once an agency offers a student a traditional internship and/or the employment-based internship is approved by both the agency and the Office of Social Work Internships, the agency must make the offer in Sonia. After the student accepts the offer in Sonia, the student must finalize their internship by completing an official Internship Confirmation Form through Sonia. The internship is not considered finalized until the Internship Confirmation Form is completed by both student and agency.

9. *When can students start applying to agencies?*

Students applying for internships which will start in Fall 2025 will begin contacting agencies as early as February 14th, 2025. Please note that Master of Social Work students continue to be admitted into the program through the spring semester. Therefore, some students will initiate their internship search beginning late spring and may not begin actively applying to agencies until late April/May. **Students must have an internship secured by August 1st for a timely start with the fall semester which begins on August 18th, 2025.**

10. *Does the university conduct background checks of students prior to entering internship?*

No. MSU Denver does not complete a background check on any student. Each agency is responsible for determining if and how background checks are completed on students and, if so, what the eligibility criteria are. Agencies differ on what is permissible in a criminal background. This should be communicated directly to the student. Agencies are responsible for communicating to the Office of Social Work Internships if there are any expectations related to verifying background check documents (for example, those agencies which use My Clinical Exchange or require an attestation letter). Agencies must also inform the Office of Social Work Internships about any other screening requirements for students (e.g. code of conduct, waivers, student agreements, etc.).

11. *Can students use the same internship agency for their internship in both the BSSW/MSW Foundation and MSW Concentration year?*

Sometimes. In order to ensure a wide breadth of experiences to facilitate growth and learning, internships are typically required to occur in a different agency during a MSW student's Concentration (advanced practice) year. In general, the Concentration year internship may not be the same as either the Foundation year or BSSW internship. If a student is requesting an exception because they are interested in staying in the same agency for their Concentration year OR the agency has designed a longitudinal internship occurring over two years, they need to show that they will have opportunities for *new learning reflecting advanced practice skills* and/or that a *new supervisor (Social Work Supervisor and/or Task Supervisor)* can be established. Students interested in this same agency request will be required to complete a Same Agency Request form and submit it to the Office of Social Work Internships for review and approval.

12. *If a student accepts an internship at an agency, but then another agency unexpectedly contacts them for an interview, can the student switch their confirmed internship?*

No. Once a student makes a commitment to accept an internship at an agency, our program expects the student to honor that commitment. Not honoring that commitment is unethical and reflects poorly on the student as a professional, damages the relationship between the agency and the university, unfairly takes away a potential opportunity from another student, and puts the

agency in a position to either lose an intern that they were planning on for the year or re-invest more time and energy into another intern search. Any student who does not honor a commitment (written or verbal) to an agency may be required to go through the Student Support Process and may be required to defer their internship or be dismissed from the program. We ask that agencies inform the Office of Social Work Internships if these circumstances occur.

Supervising Social Work Internships

13. *What are the requirements for supervising students in their internships?*

Each student must receive at least one hour of supervision every week from a qualified Social Work Supervisor.

- For BSSW students – *A qualified Social Work Supervisor must have a BSW or MSW degree from an accredited social work program with at least two years of post-degree work experience.*
- For MSW students – *A qualified Social Work Supervisor must have an MSW degree from an accredited social work program with at least two years of post-degree work experience.*

Social Work Supervisors are NOT required to be licensed as an LCSW unless the student intern is engaging in work that is considered to be clinical and regulated by the [Department of Regulatory Agencies](#). Social Work Supervisors assume a teaching role for the students. In supervision they assist in integrating social work knowledge, values, and skills into the student’s practice.

14. *Can an agency that does not have a qualified Social Work Supervisor (SWS) onsite accept a student intern?*

Maybe. In cases where there is not anyone onsite available to serve as a Social Work Supervisor, it is the agency’s responsibility to identify a supplemental Social Work Supervisor (may be off-site) to provide the necessary supervision. This Off-Site Social Work Supervisor may be a board member, a staff member of a closely related agency, or another person with significant knowledge and understanding of the internship agency. Agencies are encouraged to consult with those in their network or reference other resources for connecting with Social Workers (e.g. National Association of Social Workers, Colorado Society for Clinical Social Work, LinkedIn, etc.) who may be interested in this type of role. Spark the Change Colorado offers a [Mental Wellness Program](#) which may be able to assist with connecting agencies with social work supervisors. Please note that the process through Spark the Change Colorado can take some time, so agency internship coordinators are encouraged to discuss the need for a Social Work Supervisor with the student as soon as possible. If it is determined that they would like to request services through Spark the Change Colorado, it is advised to submit their application as soon as possible and note that this is not guaranteed. *Due to limited budgetary resources, it is only in rare instances that the Dept. of Social Work may be able to assist in identifying an Off-Site Social Work Supervisor.*

If the Social Work Supervisor is not the student’s primary supervisor, the agency must provide the student with a Task Supervisor (TS) to provide regular ongoing support and guidance on a daily basis at the agency. In this case, the Task Supervisor provides weekly, one hour supervision which is supplemented by every other week supervision provided by the SWS. The Task Supervisor does not have to hold a social work degree. However, this person should have significant work experience at the agency or with a similar client population. The Task Supervisor is responsible for monitoring the day-to-day activities of the internship. They must regularly provide one hour a week of supervision for the student. In supervision, the Task Supervisor focuses on skill development and supportive supervision.

In this scenario, the off-site Social Work Supervisor is required to provide at least one hour of supervision for the student every other week. In supervision, the student would present what they are working on in their agency and learning in class, and the off-site Social Work Supervisor would focus on helping the student connect how the social work knowledge, values, and skills they are learning in the classroom integrate with their internship activities.

Supervisor Options	Social Work Supervisor	Task Supervisor
Option 1:	One hour of weekly supervision from a Social Work Supervisor	NO TASK SUPERVISOR

Option 2:	One hour of supervision every other week from a Social Work Supervisor AND	One hour of supervision weekly from an on-site Task Supervisor
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***Note: Supervision may be a combination of individual and group sessions, depending on the learning style and needs of the student. It is strongly recommended that at least 50% of all supervision hours should be individual. When group supervision models are used, the Social Work Supervisor and/or Task Supervisor should be available to meet individually as needed throughout the semester, depending on the student's level and learning needs, for the purposes of establishing a trusted relationship and addressing any differentiated learning needs.

15. Who else is involved in supporting the social work internship?

In addition to the Social Work Supervisor (SWS), all students are assigned a Faculty Internship Liaison (FIL). The Faculty Internship Liaison is a member of the Department's faculty who provides a link between the agency, student, and school. The Faculty Internship Liaison remains in regular contact with the student and the supervisor(s) to monitor that internship learning objectives are being met, ensure academic curriculum is infused with practice in the internship, and assist with mediating any conflicts that may occur in the internship. The FIL is also responsible for leading the Field Experience class and providing two or three site visits (may be in person or virtual) per year to each student's agency.

16. Does the one hour of supervision need to be a set hour, or can a Social Work Supervisor (SWS) or Task Supervisor (TS) provide a cumulative total of one hour of supervision each week?

The supervision hour must be a set hour each week. Many Social Work Supervisors/Task Supervisors provide additional "on the go" supervision throughout the week to manage administrative issues, oversee student tasks, answer questions, and debrief cases. However, structured internship supervision combines other elements of supervision including educational supervision and supportive supervision. Students should have a designated, uninterrupted time to explore the connection between their classroom work and their internship practice, and to examine how their personal biases and identities interact with the work they do. In supervision, students should be pushed to grapple with ethical dilemmas and to consider issues of power, privilege, and social justice. Students will experience a range of emotions as they move through their internship and develop into their professional self, and they need a safe, supportive space in which to do this.

Internship Policies

17. Will students be covered under university liability insurance during their internship?

The work that students complete in any unpaid internship as part of the Field Experience class will be covered under MSU Denver's liability insurance in accordance with Colorado State Statute. In cases where students are completing paid internships and are not otherwise employed by the agency, then the university covers liability insurance. In cases where students are completing an employment-based internship and their internship duties are the same as their employment role, the employment agency's liability insurance covers the student's work. Additional details are provided in the affiliation agreement signed between MSU Denver's Dept. of Social Work and the agency. Rarely, an agency may require students to purchase liability insurance with limits beyond what the Colorado State Statue covers. Requirements to purchase additional liability insurance should be communicated directly to the student early in the internship search process and may impact the coverage provided by MSU Denver's liability insurance. Information about additional social work liability insurance may be found on the National Association of Social Workers' website: <https://naswco.socialworkers.org/>.

18. What is the MSU Denver Dept. of Social Work's policy regarding the use of a personal vehicle and transportation of clients?

Some agencies may require that students have access to their own transportation for the purposes of home visits, community work, etc. It is up to the agency to communicate to the student about the agency's vehicle requirements and mileage reimbursement policies during the interview process. Each agency will have its own policies regarding proof of driver's license and insurance. Students' use of personal or agency vehicles will not be covered under MSU Denver's insurance, nor will MSU Denver or the Department of Social Work reimburse students for the use of their vehicles or costs such as parking fees. All issues

regarding transportation, including the transportation of clients, must be discussed between the student and the Social Work Supervisor/Task Supervisor prior to beginning internship. The Department of Social Work will not be responsible for any decisions regarding transportation.

19. *Are there any considerations for students wishing to complete an internship in a private psychotherapy clinic setting?*

While social workers may choose to work in a private clinic after obtaining their licensure, these settings are generally not available for internships. One of the requirements of our community partnerships is providing social work services to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty”. (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008)

Select private psychotherapy clinics may be suitable for MSW Concentration year internships and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Office of Social Work Internships.

In order to meet the goals of the internship learning experience, private practices that wish to be approved should meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrate a commitment to serving vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, and/or diverse populations by accepting varied payment options such as Medicaid, sliding scales, etc.
- Engage with multiple external points of contact within the larger social service delivery system (e.g. schools, courts, human services, etc.).
- Articulate a defined mission and agency policies and procedures.
- Utilize a structured intake process.
- Employ at least two practitioners, one of whom is a social worker with at least 2 years of post-degree work experience and who is licensed to practice psychotherapy.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in differing treatment modalities (i.e. individual, couple, family, group).
- Serve a need in the community; address a social issue/problem affecting the community.
- Provide a learning environment where students progress on a continuum that begins with opportunities to shadow/observe social work practice and move towards more independent practice.

20. *What if there is a conflict or challenge during the internship?*

The Office of Social Work Internships is committed to ensuring that students are placed in quality learning environments to complete their internship experience. However, there may be times in which problems arise during an internship. It is best that these issues are addressed openly and immediately. Issues may be brought forth by the Student, Social Work Supervisor/Task Supervisor, Faculty Internship Liaison, or Office of Social Work Internship. In any circumstance, the Internship Support Process outlined in the [Internship Manual available on our website](#) should be followed. Students may not end an internship without going through the Internship Support Process.

**If you have additional questions, please contact the Office of Social Work Internships:
SWKinternships@msudenver.edu 303-615-1655**