

Mixed Delivery Placements and the Practicum Learning Portal

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic declared in March 2020 had an immediate impact on social work placement availability across the province, the nation, and the world. Placements underway were interrupted, and confirmed placement offers for subsequent academic terms were withdrawn and/or thrown into jeopardy. Although remote learning plans helped to mitigate the impact of placements cut short in winter term 2020, new solutions were needed to build field capacity in different ways given the scarcity of fully remote placement options available moving forward, and the concurrent pressures on agencies to prioritize service delivery, the remote working needs of staff, and funding needs, over student supervision at a time of community crisis.

These factors led to the development of a new form of social work practicum, **the Mixed Delivery Placement (MDP)**. The MDP will allow social work students at all levels to engage practicum learning without the need for a full-time agency-based Field Supervisor. The Mixed Delivery Placement retains all key components required as part of professional social work degrees; an individualized learning contract and training agenda, direct practice experience, weekly field practice supervision and evaluation, and engagement in theory-to-practice learning and reflection.

The Mixed Delivery Practicum is made up of 4 specific and required components:

- 1) **Direct social work practice experience (170 - 250 hours)** with individuals, families, groups, or communities, or in the areas of policy, community development, advocacy and/or research. This direct social work practice experience, IF UNPAID, will be achieved in an online or remote environment during any period where public health directives require physical distancing, and may include volunteer work. It is not necessary for the community agency or volunteer group to provide field supervision.
- 2) **A tailor-made training agenda (10 – 30 hours)** corresponding to the direct practice experience occurring and the student's professional interests. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a proliferation of free online training and learning opportunities spanning a variety of forms of social work practice. As part of their learning contracts, students are tasked with locating and engaging training opportunities that relate to their practice experience, and that can be reflected upon further within the context of their practice supervision.
- 3) **Weekly field practice supervision (14-21 hours)** facilitated individually and in groups by the MSW, RSW social worker in the role of faculty liaison. Using a relationship-based

reflective supervision model, the faculty liaison will facilitate focused theory-to-practice reflection on practice experiences arising, as well as engage in processes of feedback and evaluation. Students will bring examples of practice into supervision, including moments of uncertainty, challenge or achievement.

- 4) **Engagement with the Practicum Learning Portal (up to 70 hours).** This newly developed online resource provides valuable experiential and applied learning opportunities to students engaging in the mixed delivery practicum option. The PLP is comprised of 7 active learning modules that approximate practicum experiences to the greatest extent possible using videotaped mini-lectures, peer-to-peer activities, simulated monologues, role plays, discussions, creative arts exercises, reflections, and community/online inquiry and exploration. Each module contains rubrics that set standards for successful completion, and the faculty liaison is responsible for oversight and evaluation of portal participation. The portal allows the faculty liaison to directly observe the critical thinking, affective processes and reflective abilities of the students, and to evaluate practice development and professional suitability.

Although the Practicum Learning Portal is organized using topic areas as one would see in the classroom, there are two distinct differences:

1. Each module requires the learner to engage in active learning, ranging from role plays, case studies, simulations, community scans, peer-to-peer dialogue, videos, audio reflections etc. There are minimal readings, only short videotaped lectures, and written assignments are limited, both in number (there are few) and type (reflective only – not academic papers).
2. Each module has been developed by an MSW social worker consultant with extensive expertise in the various areas of practice represented. The modules are intended to simulate, as much as possible, the kind of learning that would occur on practicum under the supervision of these practitioners.

The module outline for the Practicum Learning Portal is included at the end of this document, for more information. Please be advised that precise content is subject to change as part of ongoing portal development.

Instructions for Students

If you are interested in pursuing a mixed delivery practicum, you are asked to proceed as follows:

- Please advise the BSW Practicum Coordinator of your intention to seek a practice opportunity in the community that would qualify you for the mixed delivery practicum, **as soon as possible**.
- Proceed to seek a volunteer work experience or part-time paid work experience that would provide 15-20 hours per week of practice experience. It is not necessary to ask for practicum supervision as part of this experience.

- **If your practice component is paid**, you are permitted to engage in onsite work if available, and you must follow all agency policies and protocols as to PPE and physical distancing.
- **If your practice component is volunteer**, your experience must be limited to remote practice during all periods where public health directives require physical distancing.

Module Outline: Practicum Learning Portal (PLP)

1. Practice at a time of pandemic

- a. Self-reflection: What has COVID meant to me?
- b. Self-care and Support
- c. Working Remotely: Ethics and Issues
 - i. Environmental scan – How have things changed in practice?
(Practice, client needs, community resources, connections)
 - ii. Maintaining boundaries: Risks and Strategies
 - iii. Telephone work
 - iv. Video work
 - v. Electronic communication
 - vi. Remote supervision and consultation
- d. Optional: Field education – Sharing the Learning
Photo montage project – University of Calgary

2. Culturally responsive practice

- a. Culturally responsive social work practice

3. Grief, Loss and Trauma

- a. Triggered grief, loss, and trauma – the COVID experience
- b. The Companioning Model (Alan Wolfelt)
- c. Exploring the losses – What has been lost and how can SW help?
- d. Collective grief and trauma
- e. Healing and Recovery
 - i. Making meaning of loss and trauma
 - ii. Reflections on the future: Hopes and Fears
 - iii. Exercising agency: “Be the change you want to see in the world” (Gandhi)

4. Deepening Practice Engagement: EFT and EFFT - for MSW Students only

- a. Work with youth, couples, families
- b. Emotionally focused therapy
- c. Emotionally focused family therapy

5. Deepening Practice Engagement: Generalist Practice - for BSW Students only

- a. Creating connection: the power of empathy
- b. Use of self in practice
- c. Assessment – What does it really look like? Why is it important?
- d. Intervention – Your experiences and challenges
- e. Engaging simulated monologues
- f. Group work, role plays, discussion boards etc.

6. Exploring CBT for Anxiety: For BSW and MSW Students

- a. COVID and anxiety – Exploring the connections
 - i. Previous challenges with anxiety
 - ii. Health vulnerabilities and anxiety
 - iii. New heightened anxiety
 - iv. Social determinants of mental health
- b. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
 - i. Theoretical foundations
 - ii. Key concepts
 - iii. Application

7. Policy, advocacy and community engagement:

- a. Disproportionate impact of COVID
- b. Environmental scan – recent policy development and implementation
- c. Avenues for advocacy – Who is organizing to advocate? How? Impact?
- d. Activity – Getting involved

8. Group work practice

1. Help students understand how group work differs from work with individuals and the benefits of developing group work practice skills
2. Introduce a model based on the tenets of mutual aid and locate it within an inclusive group work framework
3. Discuss group dynamics, roles and facilitation
4. Identify common issues at beginning, middle and end of groups and skills to address them
5. Discuss ways to maintain a reflective group work practice