



INFO SHEET | FULFILLING FIELD EDUCATION HOURS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

March 16, 2020

This is a rapidly evolving situation, for the latest information frequently visit:

- [CSWE COVID-19 Response](#)
- [Accreditation-specific COVID-19 Info](#)
- **Note:** This info sheet will be continuously updated and dated

CSWE's Department of Social Work Accreditation (DOSWA) and the Commission on Accreditation (COA) are responsive to the health and safety of program faculty, staff, students, field personnel, and the clients, constituents, and communities they serve daily. In addition to the important information on the centralized [COVID-19 response CSWE webpage](#) continues to curate, this info sheet is intended to address the most frequently asked questions regarding accreditation standards, compliance requirements, and alternative options for fulfilling field education hours. As information emerges, CSWE will continue to distribute up-to-date information to members.

To better understand how social work programs and their institutions are responding to COVID-19, CSWE is conducting a pulse survey. **Your participation in the pulse survey, sent by CSWE to all programs on March 12th, benefits accredited social work programs because the next step for the accreditation team is to compile and distribute an online crowd-sourced list of virtual field education task/activities.** Ideas collected in the survey about fulfilling field hours will be included in a webpage curated by the accreditation team. The list is forthcoming and will be located on [CSWE's accreditation webpage](#) and will give all programs access to ideas that from survey responses and will allow programs to continue sharing ideas.

The most frequently asked question the accreditation team is receiving is: ***How does my program remain aligned with CSWE requirements when students are unable to practice onsite in their field settings due to a crisis?***

Four accreditation standards in the [2015 EPAS](#) guide this response:

- Current COA interpretation of **Accreditation Standard 2.2.4 allows “in-person” contact to be accomplished through digital technologies.**
- The required minimum of 400 hours of field education for baccalaureate programs and the minimum of 900 hours for master's programs in **Accreditation Standard 2.2.5 cannot be waived** since they are related to licensing requirements in many states.
- **Accreditation Standard 2.2.7** requires that programs have policies, procedures, and criteria in place for supporting student safety in field placements.
- For cases in which a credentialed field instructor is unavailable or unable to continue student supervision due to the field placement site closing, the program assumes responsibility for reinforcing a social work perspective directly with the student per **Accreditation Standard B/M 2.2.9.** For example, field seminar instructors may add

additional supervision time to the end of the seminar class for students who do not have access to the credentialed field instructor.

Programs should decide how best to meet field education requirements in a manner that is appropriate for their students, their community, and their unique challenges. Accreditation standards require a minimum number of required hours for field education 400 hours for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for master's programs (AS 2.2.5). If the program requires additional hours above and beyond the minimum per AS 2.2.5, the program may choose to reduce or eliminate the additional hours.

For master's programs only, with an advanced standing status option, the program ensures that advanced standing students complete a total of 900 field education hours between their accredited baccalaureate and master's social work programs. For example, if a BSW student completed 450 field hours, then as an MSW student, they need only complete 450 hours should the program permit (AS 2.2.5, [2015 EPAS Interpretation Guide](#)).

Additionally, field education programs must ensure that demonstration of social work competencies is through in-person contact, which refers to interpersonal interactions with clients and constituencies, and may include the use of digital technologies (AS 2.2.4, [2015 EPAS Interpretation Guide](#)). The EPAS allow for technology-based social work practice (e.g., telehealth, telework, phone contact with colleagues, clients, and constituents, remote access to platforms and projects, etc.).

Field agencies may work with students to allow/support telework. For example, can students complete client case/paperwork on a secure server, call into meetings, work on projects from home, engage in professional development activities, and meet virtually with their field instructor? Of course, these ideas may not replace all field hours that may be missed due to a crisis, yet perhaps can serve close the gap. Such telework solutions can be temporary while the program convenes to develop longer term solutions.

Components of student field education can be temporarily facilitated via technology. Some programs have had students work on crisis response policies, procedures, notifications, and education (e.g., handouts, PowerPoints, webinars, PSAs, email blasts, etc.) based on the crisis or natural/manmade disaster.

- For example, a field education program in Puerto Rico developed a list of crisis response tasks students could engage in specific to their agency regarding Hurricane Maria aftermath. This included a student at a mental health agency creating fliers with information about local services for basic needs and support groups offered to begin healing from traumatic experiences.
- Another example, during the Flint Water Crisis, students worked with local congregations to organize bottled water collection and distribution.
- In the case of a public health issue, for example, students may engage in number of activities including:
 - Help with public education about staying healthy
 - Connect clients to Medicaid/Medicare or other affordable healthcare plans
 - Propose revisions to agency policies and procedures about safety
 - Contact clients to inform them of any changes to regularly scheduled services
 - Create lists of referrals to other community resources their clients may need
 - Work on projects or plans for future events or initiatives
 - Engage in virtual professional development to assist them in their agency (e.g., webinars, DSM review, informational interviews with partner organizations, etc.)
 - Craft awareness efforts via placement's social media accounts
 - Compose advocacy writings to elected officials about issues and legislation the agency is connected to/populations they serve
 - Etc.

Note that simulated practice situations may supplement the student's education, but not replace required field education hours (AS 2.2.5, [2015 EPAS Interpretation Guide](#)). Simulated practice situations are defined in the [2015 EPAS Glossary](#). In the classroom the program may consider a few extra touchpoints for simulating working with clients and constituents' groups to support (not replace) required field hours.

Ultimately it is the responsibility of social work programs in conjunction with their host institutions to make decisions and accommodations about risk management, safety, the educational experience of students, including field placements (AS 2.2.7). Programs are encouraged to work with their host institutions to provide a consistent approach for students across all programs within an institution. Legal counsel, healthcare providers, or other educational programs, such as schools of nursing or education, may provide input on consistent safety policies. We also encourage programs to connect with their state-based [social work licensing board](#), state higher education authority, and regional accreditor regarding minimum educational requirements and any necessary notification of program changes or contingency/continuity plans.

Whether social work students are practicing onsite or virtually, it is vital to continue promoting good hygiene practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases:

- Stay home if you are sick, and advise others to do the same.
- Always cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with a tissue or the crook of your arm.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and warm water are not available.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces (computers, keyboards, desks, etc.).

The [CDC has provided guidance for preventing the spread of COVID-19](#) in communities, educational settings, and workplaces.

If you have additional questions regarding accreditation standards, compliance requirements, and alternative options for fulfilling field education hours, please join the accreditation team for a **CSWE Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response Q&A webinar via Zoom on Thursday, March 19, 2020 | 2:00pm ET**. To participate, click on this link: <https://cswe.zoom.us/j/2726997532>. This session will be recorded, and a link will be made available on [CSWE's Accreditation webpage](#) for those who are unable to participate.

Thank you for your patience during this difficult time when the accreditation team is dealing with a situation that we have never experienced before. CSWE is doing its best to be proactive and responsive. We look forward to sharing ideas and best practices in handling field education when that information is received and providing support to programs as our nation and the world addresses the spread of COVID-19.

- *Accreditation Team*