Letter to MSSW Field Students

Dear Student,

We understand that you must be experiencing the stress of uncertainty about how you will be able to finish your spring field placement during the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. We instituted a pause on field attendance during Spring Break so that we could take the time to develop a plan for your successful completion of spring field. We apologize for the quick notifications and rapid changes of direction, but this event has required daily updates and decisions.

After much deliberation, the College of Social Work administration has made a final decision to suspend student in-person attendance at field agencies for the remainder of the spring semester. We understand that this decision will be disappointing and frustrating for some of you. The decision was made with concern to protect you, your agency’s clients and staff, and to participate ethically in a public health response to a highly contagious and dangerous illness. Many field agencies had already decided to move to remote operations and/or to end student placements. The University has made a decision to move all possible personnel to telecommuting and remote work activities to decrease exposure on the UT campus. Students will not be allowed to complete any additional field assignments or activities onsite at agencies.

Our college has both BSSW and MSSW students at different points in their programs of study. The field faculty have developed a list of requirements for completion of spring field for each level of student along with a step-by-step procedure. That information is attached to this email, will be posted on CANVAS, and will also be linked on the CSW website. Please read carefully the requirements and the procedure and then contact your Field Coordinator with any questions or concerns. Over the next few days, Field Coordinators will be reaching out to students, posting information on CANVAS, providing informational videos, and scheduling office hours by Zoom.

You will note that we have included in the procedures the requirement that you work with your agency Field Instructor to finalize your placement activities in a professional manner. We share your concern for the impact on your clients during this stressful time and we want you to be able to appropriately communicate and terminate with clients, if possible. We also want you, if possible, to complete and close out any projects that you have been completing for the agency. Please explore with your Field Instructor how you can communicate your appreciation and good-byes to agency staff. We know that you may be experiencing some grief about ending your time at the agency, and we cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is to end as well as you can.

In developing the plan, we have been attentive to compliance with our accreditation standards and also to the requirement that students demonstrate all competencies addressed in the learning plan. Our college curriculum actually requires more field hours than are required by the accreditation standards of The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). We have decreased requirements for field hours in alignment with accreditation standards. Please refer to the Requirements for Completion of Field document (attached) to identify how many hours you will need to document for the spring semester.

Please see attached a form title Field Plan for Remote Learning Activities. Please refer to the Requirements document to determine whether you will need to complete this form. You will need to complete and submit this form to your Field Coordinator by March 27.
This decision also applies to students in employment-based placements. Students completing placements at their place of employment will be expected to complete all field activities away from the agency.

Please note that, if you choose to volunteer at your agency site, you will not be able to count those hours or activities toward your field requirements. You will not be considered a student for those activities and will not be covered by the UT professional liability insurance.

Please be assured that your Field Coordinators, Field Liaisons, and I are all ready and available to support you as you navigate this process. Take care, be well, and keep in touch.

All the best,

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