SOCIAL WORK 348 - PRACTICUM I
PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & RECOGNITION
STUDENT GUIDE
Faculty of Social Work Mission Statement

The social work program of education, research and community service is designed to prepare students for critical generalist social work practice with diverse peoples. Informed by the principles of social justice, the social work program encourages students to identify the needs of the disadvantaged, marginalized and oppressed; to develop the commitment, knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills required to confront structural inequalities; to address personal issues; and to empower individuals, families, and communities to realize their full potential.

Portions of this document adapted from the University of Victoria School of Social Work Prior Learning Assessment Workbook (2012).

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INTRODUCTION

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is a structured method of assessing a student’s prior learning or experience to award formal credit. This process considers learning you have acquired through your professional, volunteer, and personal experiences, including skills training and professional knowledge attained through informal or non-credited learning experiences. No matter where your knowledge may come from, the University of Regina PLAR process allows you to apply your knowledge, skills, and abilities toward University of Regina degrees, certificates, or diplomas.

PLAR credit will be assessed and awarded for undergraduate-level, university credit programs only. The Faculty of Social Work may evaluate and grant credit for qualifying informal learning up to a maximum of 15 credit hours in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program. This credit is awarded on a case-by-case basis through the PLAR process.
SECTION 1: PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & RECOGNITION FOR BSW PRACTICUM COURSES

SW 448 – Practicum II

Practicum II (470 field hours), cannot be considered for prior learning credit due to requirements within the CASWE Standards for Accreditation (2014). CASWE standards require students to complete a minimum of 700 field hours at the BSW level, and prior learning credit may be granted for a maximum of fifty percent of the required field hours. Standard SB 3.2.2 states:

Where academic credit is given for previous work and/or relevant experience in lieu of the practicum, the academic unit has written policy that specifies clear criteria and procedures used to assess skills and knowledge normally obtained through the practicum. Academic credit for previous work and/or relevant experience may be provided for a maximum of one half of the required hours of practicum specified in the program (e.g., 350 hours of 700 required hours). (CASWE, 2014, p. 14)

All other undergraduate social work courses are eligible to be challenged for PLAR credit, including SW 348 – Practicum I.

SW 348 – Practicum II

Students applying for credit for SW 348 - Practicum I, must:

- have a minimum of 2 years of full-time waged or unwaged human service experience (approximately 4000 hours), which has been completed in the past 10 years
- have successfully completed the prerequisites for the course (currently SW 390, SW 346, and SW 100, 6 additional SW credit hours, plus a minimum grade point average of 70% in the Social Work portion of their BSW) prior to credit being granted
- contact the appropriate Practicum Placement Coordinator prior to the relevant practicum application deadline to discuss their intent to apply for PLAR credit and, if needed, participate in the placement planning process
- clearly demonstrate in their PLAR application how they have met the objectives and competencies for SW 348

The Faculty of Social Work recognizes that human service work occurs in a variety of settings including organizations, systems, and communities. A diversity of experience is highly valued in the PLAR process. Students who have completed practica in a diploma or certificate program may draw from their learning from these practice experiences in their applications.
SECTION 2: APPLYING FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT FOR SW 348 – PRACTICUM I

Students applying for prior learning assessment for SW 348 – Practicum I are required to submit a portfolio that demonstrates their learning, including knowledge, skills, and abilities. SW 348 is made up of two components: the field placement and the integrative seminars (including academic assignments). Therefore, in addition to human service experience, students seeking prior learning credit for SW 348 must demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on this experience and integrate theory and practice, as articulated in the objectives for the course (see Appendix A).

Application Deadlines

Students who submit PLAR applications for SW 348 by the 15th of the first month of every term can expect a response by the end of that term. Application deadlines are:

- Fall: September 15 (response by December 31)
- Winter: January 15 (response by April 30)
- Spring/Summer: May 15 (response by August 30)

Application Fees

There is a fee associated with PLAR assessment. For details, please refer to the 'other fees' section of the University of Regina's undergraduate domestic or international fee schedules.

Eligibility Criteria

Students applying for credit for SW 348 – Practicum I must:

- have a minimum of 2 years of full-time waged or unwaged human service experience (approximately 4000 hours), which has been completed in the past 10 years;
- have successfully completed the prerequisites for the course (currently SW 390, SW 346, and SW 100, 6 additional SW credit hours, plus a minimum grade point average of 70% in the Social Work portion of their BSW) prior to credit being granted;
- contact the appropriate Practicum Placement Coordinator prior to the relevant practicum application deadline to discuss their intent to apply for PLAR credit.
(for contact information, see the Faculty of Social Work BSW Practicum website; and
• clearly demonstrate in their PLAR application how they have met the objectives and competencies for SW 348.

The Faculty of Social Work recognizes that human service work occurs in a variety of settings including organizations, systems, communities, and coalitions. A diversity of experience is highly valued in this process. Students who have completed practica in a social work or related diploma or certificate program are encouraged to draw from their learning in these practice experiences for their PLAR applications.
SECTION 3: PREPARING YOUR APPLICATION PACKAGE

Prior Learning Portfolio

Portfolios submitted for prior learning assessment for SW 348 will follow the format identified by the URegina Centre for Continuing Education. Detailed information on portfolio format and content is available on the Centre for Continuing Education website. Following are some tips to help you along the way.

1. **Give yourself enough time.** Preparing your portfolio takes a significant amount of time, thought, and reflection. Be sure to allow sufficient time to collect the required content, develop the written sections, and have a colleague or friend review your portfolio prior to submission. Based on the experiences of previous students who have prepared RPL portfolios for SW 348, you can expect to take up to three months to compile your portfolio.

2. **Focus on integrating social work theory, ethics, and other knowledge with practice.** Portfolios are expected to provide clear evidence of knowledge, skills, and abilities regarding the objectives of the course (see Appendix A) and the competencies identified in the SW 348 field placement evaluation form (see Appendix B).

You are encouraged to include pieces of information which would provide insight into your learning about self, anti-oppressive practice, and social justice. This may include previously collected evaluation forms from participants in groups/workshops you have facilitated (de-identified), letters from previous people with who you’ve worked which attest to your practice approach and ethical practice, editorials, notes/entries which capture how you have engaged with the complexities of practice etc.

Following are some questions that may be used to guide your reflection. Please note: You are not expected to relate your full personal life history, just those experiences which have been influential in shaping your views and emerging understanding of, and approach to, social work practice:

- What life experiences have shaped your views on social work and social justice?
- How has your understanding of your social, cultural, professional, political, and historical location and identities both facilitated and constrained your ability to practice anti-oppressively?
- What theoretical frameworks and practice approaches have informed your understanding of social work and social justice?
• How has your human service practice changed over time to become more critical, self-reflective, and anti-oppressive?
• How have you benefited from and/or been complicit in the oppression of non-dominant groups in our society?
• Reflect on a time in your human service practice when your approach to interacting with a person or group was influenced by your social position and its associated power and privilege. What did you learn about social work through this experience? What did you learn about yourself? How did you ultimately address this? Explain how this learning has informed your emerging approach to social work practice.
• Provide an example from your practice of when you challenged an existing service, policy, practice, or decision which you viewed as oppressive. How did you come to recognize this service, policy, or practice as problematic? What form did the challenge take? What was your primary learning from this experience? In hindsight, is there anything you would do differently? Your critical inquiry should rely heavily on anti-oppressive theory as well as practice.
• How is social work currently and historically implicated in maintaining structural inequalities for, and oppression of, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of colour), 2SLBGTQ (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) people, people with disabilities, and other oppressed groups? Who benefits from our current approaches to human services and social support? How? Consider micro, macro, and mezzo layers as part of your response.
• In what traditional Indigenous territory is your community located? If your work or volunteer experience has primarily been situated within a non-Indigenous group, organization, or institution, describe and analyze the protocols which have been developed for working with Indigenous people and communities in your area. If no formal protocols have been established, examine why this is so and what you see as opportunities for change.
• What does our profession’s commitment to pursue social justice mean to you? How have you demonstrated your commitment to social justice in your personal and/or human service experience? How have you been challenged in the pursuit of social justice?
• What are your beliefs and values about the social worker-’client’ relationship? How have you acted on your beliefs within your social work practice? An exploration of your ability to practice with diverse individuals, groups, and/or communities is essential here.
• Provide an example of your professional writing that demonstrates your ability to write clearly and critically. This might include a report or assessment that you have conducted in your work, letter to the editor, submission to a newsletter, funding or program proposal, or letter written on behalf of person you’ve supported (be sure to delete all identifying information to protect confidentiality).
• Provide an example from your experience where your personal and political values and ethics were challenged by, or in conflict with, the Social Work Code of Ethics. Discuss the nature of the tension or conflict, what you did, and what you would do differently if given the opportunity. What learning did you gain from this experience, and how has this learning been applied to your current practice?

3. **Be mindful of social work ethics, particularly confidentiality and informed consent.** Due to the power differential inherent in the 'client' - social worker relationship, you are asked not to solicit a reference or evaluation from people who access services. If using feedback from program participants or people who access services in your application, be sure to remove any identifying information and ensure you have the person’s permission to use their feedback for this purpose.

4. **Make sure you speak to each of the course competencies and objectives in your portfolio.** It can be helpful to use these as headings to structure parts of your portfolio, and to provide these as guidance to individuals who are writing letters of attestation on your behalf.
SECTION 4: THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Applications for prior learning credit for SW 348 – Practicum I will be assessed by a panel of social work faculty members who have experience in field education. The assessment is structured around seven core competencies (see Appendix B), which form the foundation for evaluating student knowledge, skills, and abilities in both the field placement and seminar portions of the course.

When considering how well an applicant has demonstrated each of the competencies identified on the assessment form, assessors will consider the following elements:

- **Critical self-reflection:** Applicants will demonstrate an understanding of how their social, political, and historical location/position impacts and informs their emerging approach to social work practice.

- **Integration of theory and practice:** Through analysis of actual examples from their experience, applicants will demonstrate an understanding of how theory and practice come together by describing how various social work theories and practice approaches (i.e., anti-oppressive, systems, Indigenous, structural, etc.) have been integrated into their practice.

- **Ability to generalize previous learning to current practice:** Applicants will demonstrate an understanding of how a variety of life and work experiences have shaped their current approach to practice and how they have been intentional about applying ongoing learning to improve and evolve practice.

- **Engagement with the complexities and contradictions of practice:** By examining the challenging and complex context of their experiences as they relate to social work practice, applicants will demonstrate an ability to critically examine social work practice approaches, practice settings, social policy, and social issues.

- **Clear, concise, and organized writing:** Applicants will demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly and concisely, organize content, and integrate content from social work classes and literature. As such, references to learnings and readings from previous courses, especially those focusing on various levels of social work practice, social work ethics, and social policy, will be essential. Applicants are expected to use proper APA formatting (7th Ed.) for citations and references.
The assessment panel meets once each term to review applications received, and through a process of consensus comes to a recommendation regarding whether the applicant will be granted credit for SW 348. The panel’s recommendations are forwarded to the Associate Dean – Undergraduate, who makes the final decision regarding awarding credit. This decision is communicated to the applicant in writing by the end of the term in which the application was received. Decisions of the Associate Dean – Undergraduate are final; there is no appeal.
APPENDIX A: SW 348 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Calendar Description: Students, with support of agency supervision, will become directly involved in social work services and systems within the community, and experience socially responsible professional practice. Seminars assist in the integration of theory and practice through sharing of experience and knowledge. The course work will be graded on a pass/fail basis.

Goal: To assist the student's integration of the theoretical and methodological foundations of social work practice with practice opportunities.

Objectives: This practicum is intended to assist students in:

- broadening their human service experience by engaging with and assisting social workers in direct practice
- demonstrating an understanding of the effective use of self
- examining personal value biases, emotional reactions, and the impact they have on others
- applying reflective and critical thinking to:
  - self and the practicum experience within the context of the placement, client population and emerging practice issues
  - social policies and their influence on the agency, clients, and community
  - theories of social work practice
  - diversity and forms of oppression
APPENDIX B: SW 348 CORE COMPETENCIES

To receive credit for SW 348 – Practicum I, students must demonstrate competency in each of the following areas:

1. Understanding of service delivery systems and the ability to work within them.
2. Understanding of and the ability to use a range of formal and informal resources.
3. Positive use of social work principles, values, ethics, and knowledge in professional interactions.
4. Ability to develop helping relationships, solve problems and communicate effectively in professional interactions.
5. Ability to make effective use of supervision including the ability to integrate feedback.
6. Ability to effectively manage the assigned workload and employs effective written communication skills.
7. Open approach to learning, self-awareness, and professional development.