

Your Questions Answered:

What is the 'professional supervision' requirement for practicum students?

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One aspect of practicum that can be challenging is professional supervision. What exactly does that mean? What needs to happen? How much is "enough"?

What do we mean by "professional supervision"?

The process by which field educators facilitate a student's learning through practical training and professional development in a human service organization is generally referred to as supervision. Most social workers and human service practitioners have some experience with professional supervision. They have their own experiences as students, and may have witnessed, experienced, or provided other types of professional supervision throughout their career. In social work field placements, 'professional supervision' is not just task

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management or direction/assessment of performance. It includes support, education, and other activities.

Supervision by Field Instructors is an ongoing process that takes place throughout the time you spend together, but should also include some structured supervision time, occurring at least weekly; thirty to sixty minutes per week is recommended. During supervision, the student and Field Instructor(s) explore the student's progress and performance, engage in critical reflection on practice, talk about broader practice issues such as social work ethics and theory, and plan learning activities.

In the context of social work practicum, professional supervision must be provided by someone who has a BSW degree (or higher) and is well-versed in social work theories, practice approaches, and ethics. If a student's Field Instructor does not have a social work background, the Faculty of Social Work provides bi-weekly group supervision sessions, which are facilitated by our Field Education Coordinator.

What should we talk about in supervision?

Supervisors are ultimately accountable for the service provided by those who work under them, whether they are employees or students. They are required to make judgements about others' performance. Their role involves providing support, encouragement, and assistance in translating the organizational duties, responsibilities, policies etc. which regulate practice.

The most notable distinction between student and employee supervision is "the explicit educational responsibility that the [practicum] supervisor assumes" (Knight, 2004, p.111). It is the student's learning needs, according to Knight, that "define [the practicum supervisor's] responsibilities" (p.111). So, when it comes to the focus of supervision or deciding which topic(s) to discuss, we suggest starting with the student's learning goals, and providing feedback on their learning activities.

Other topics and questions to explore in supervision include:

- Relationship building between student and Field Instructor: Why social work? What are you passionate about? What are your areas of practice interest and experience? What are the Field Instructor's insights into SW/human service work? What do you wish you would have known when you were studying social work? How do you strive for balance, self-care, etc.?
- Field Instructor teaching/supervision style and student's learning style/needs: Will supervision be formal or informal? How often will it take place? What is expected in terms of student preparation for supervision? What is the student's experience with supervision? Does the student have any learning and/or support needs?

- Practice style and approaches: What theories and/or practice models do you (and/or your agency or program) use? What does the student think you use? What do you wish you would've learned, thought/talked about, considered, etc. when you were a practicum student? How does what the student is observing/experiencing in practicum align with what they've learned in the classroom?
- Field Instructor's evaluation approach: How do the competencies being assessed translate to the practice setting? How will you gather information to inform the evaluation? Does the student have any questions or concerns about the evaluation process?

Learn More about Field Supervision

[Field Instructor Resources](#) (Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto)

[The Meaning and Value of Supervision in Social Work Field Education](#) (Ketner, Cooper-Bolinskey, & VanCleave, 2017)

Attend a URegina [Field Instructor Training](#) Session!