FULFILLING FIELD EXPERIENCE HOURS DURING CORONAVIRUS EVENT

- Current Commission on Accreditation interpretation of Accreditation Standard (AS) 2.2.4 allows “in-person” contact to be accomplished through digital technologies.

- The required 400 hours of field experience for baccalaureate programs and the minimum of 900 hours for master’s programs that are specified in AS 2.2.5 cannot be waived, because they are related to licensing requirements in many states.

How does my program remain aligned with CSWE requirements when students are unable to practice on site in their field settings due to a crisis?

Programs should decide how best to meet field education requirements in a manner that is appropriate for their students, their communities, and their unique challenges. Accreditation standards require a minimum for field education of 400 hours for baccalaureate programs and 900 hours for master’s programs (AS 2.2.5).

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 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (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).

Field agencies may work with students to allow/support telework. For example, students might do client case/paperwork on a secure server, call in for meetings, work on projects from home, engage in professional development activities, and meet virtually with their field instructors. Of course, these ideas might not replace all field hours missed during a crisis, but perhaps they can help close the gap. Such telework solutions can be temporary until the program convenes to develop long-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, public service announcements) 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 accomplish specific to their agency regarding the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. This included having a student at a mental health agency create fliers with information about local services for basic needs and support groups that offered to help with healing after traumatic experiences.

In another example, students worked with local religious congregations during the Flint, MI, water crisis to organize bottled water collection and distribution.

In the case of a public health issue, students may engage in activities such as these:

- Help with public education about staying healthy
- Connect clients to Medicaid/Medicare or other affordable health-care plans
- Propose revisions to agency policies and procedures about safety
- Contact clients to inform them of changes to regularly scheduled services
• Create lists of referrals to other community resources that clients might need
• Work on projects or plans for future events or initiatives
• Engage in virtual professional development to support their work at the placement (e.g., webinars, DSM review, informational interviews with partner organizations)
• Develop awareness posts to be used on the placement’s social media accounts
• Write advocacy communications to elected officials about issues and legislation the agency is connected to or populations it serves

Note that simulated practice situations may supplement the student’s education but cannot replace required field experience hours (AS 2.2.5, 2015 EPAS Interpretation Guide). 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 about and accommodations for risk management, safety, and the educational experience of students, including field placements (AS 2.2.7).