



St. Thomas
UNIVERSITY

School of Social Work
Policy Governing Professional Readiness

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CONTACT

School of Social Work

(506) 452-0540 | socialwork@stu.ca

The Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE) requires the School of Social Work to have in place procedures for assessing the readiness of their students for professional practice. St. Thomas University has developed the following policy to be invoked when there are concerns related to a student's professional readiness.

1. Scope and Purpose

All students in the Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Work programs are expected to demonstrate attitudes, values, and conduct that are consistent with the Canadian Association of Social Workers' (CASW) and the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers' (NBASW) Codes of Ethics during classroom participation, through written assignments, in presentations, in field contexts, and outside of the classroom. Further, all students are expected to perform to at least the minimum acceptable level of standard set for them in each portion of this academic program. Together, these elements can be defined as "professional readiness for social work practice."

The purpose of this policy is to assist faculty in evaluating student readiness for professional social work practice, and to outline a fair and transparent process for addressing concerns about a student's readiness.

All students at St. Thomas University are required to comply with University policies. Students enrolled in our professional programs have additional responsibilities regarding personal and professional readiness through compliance with specific School of Social Work policies included in the University Calendar and in the School of Social Work Student Handbooks.

2. Lack of Readiness Leading to Deferred or Denied Field Placement

To ensure that the interests of Social Services users are a first priority, and to provide the best professional training possible, the following procedures will be followed in the case of a deferred or denied field placement:

a) Deferred Field Placement (Self-Identified)

A field placement may be deferred if the student submits a written request, with supporting documentation citing substantial medical or compassionate reasons, to the Director of the School of Social Work.

b) Denied Field Placement (School-Identified)

When a student is deemed by the School not ready to begin a field placement, the onus is on the student to demonstrate readiness by adequately addressing the concerns that led to the denial.

When the School of Social Work denies a field placement, the Director will:

1. Meet with the student to discuss the concerns that have led to the denial, and co-develop a plan to resolve them, including measurable indicators outlining the progress the student must make and the time frame within which the concerns must be addressed.
2. Document dates and content of all meetings with the student.

3. Provide the student with written documentation that outlines the plan, including the timeline and indicators of progress.

When the concerns have been adequately addressed to the satisfaction of the School, arrangements for a field placement will be undertaken. When the concerns have not been met, the School will proceed to a Readiness Review, as outlined in Section 4 of this policy.

3. Circumstances That May Result in a Readiness Review

Students must be aware that their behaviour outside the University and social work practice environments, including certain aspects of their personal lives, may have an impact on their readiness for practice.

The onus is on the student to demonstrate readiness for professional social work practice to the satisfaction of the School of Social Work, including, but not limited to, interactions with peers and University faculty and staff; comprehension and integration of academic course content; and practical learning and field placements.

This policy is to be applied when there is concern about a student's readiness for professional social work practice. The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances that may raise concerns about professional readiness and trigger a review process:

- evidence of a violation of the Professional Code of Ethics of the New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW) and/or the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), of the New Brunswick Human Rights Act, of St. Thomas University policies or regulations, or of School of Social Work policies outlined in the Student Handbooks;
- evidence that concerns leading to a denied field placement have not been adequately addressed to the satisfaction of the School of Social Work;
- attempts to gain advantage or deceive, through falsification, forgery, plagiarism, or misuse of any record or document;
- harassment, or any threat, intimidation, or attempt to harm another person;
- persistent substance use, legal or illegal, that interferes with the student's ability to function within a professional context;
- a physical or mental condition which impairs essential social work performance, recognizing that reasonable accommodation for the special needs of individuals is required by the New Brunswick Human Rights Act;¹
- evidence that behaviour or attitude has interfered with the student's ability to work with others at the School or in the field agency;
- lack of openness to the principles of anti-oppression and anti-privilege social work practice;
- lack of openness to the beliefs and perspectives of others;
- evidence of a conviction due to a violation of the Criminal Code of Canada;
- failure to disclose pending criminal charges;
- failure in, or failure to complete, one or more courses in the program, including the field practicum;

¹ Reasonable accommodation, as defined by St. Thomas University, entails adjusting a course, program, policy, procedure, or the physical environment adversely affecting a student, without compromising academic integrity or changing the essential educational requirements of the program. Having prior knowledge of any required accommodations generally results in students having a greater likelihood of success in the Social Work program.

- failure to adhere to the attendance policy of the School and/or the field agency.

4. The Review Process

Depending on the nature of the infraction, the School of Social Work reserves the right to proceed with a review at any point in the student's program, and the Field Instructor² has the right to bypass the review process and terminate the placement at any point.

The review process is designed to assist students in dealing with concerns that have an impact on their performance in the School. All parties, at all stages, will respect the confidentiality of information that may be disclosed during the review process. Documentation of the process will be placed in the student's file in the School, and decisions will be sent by the Director to the Registrar's Office to be placed in the student's file.

A Review will be initiated by the Course Instructor or Field Instructor as follows:

Course Instructor will:

1. Notify the Director and the student that a review is being initiated.
2. Set up a formal meeting with the Course Instructor, the Director, and the student to discuss the concerns and co-develop a plan to resolve them to the satisfaction of the School, including measurable indicators outlining the progress the student must make and the time frame within which the concerns must be addressed.
3. Document dates and content of all meetings with the student.
4. Provide the student with written documentation that outlines the plan, including the timeline and indicators of progress.

Field Instructor will:

1. Notify the Director and the student that a review is being initiated.
2. Set up a formal meeting with the Field Instructor, the Faculty Field Liaison,³ and the student to discuss the concerns and co-develop a plan to resolve them to the satisfaction of the School, including measurable indicators outlining the progress the student must make and the time frame within which the concerns must be addressed.
3. Document dates and content of all meetings with the student.
4. Provide the student with written documentation that outlines the plan, including the timeline and indicators of progress.

² The Field Instructor is usually a social worker employed by the host agency who meets the criteria as set out by the program and who has primary responsibility for the student's field experience.

³ The Faculty Field Liaison is a faculty member of the School responsible for liaising with students and their Field Instructor, for providing the link between a field placement setting and the faculty, and ensuring effective three-way communication.

In many instances, meetings between the parties will resolve the concerns and will not lead to further action. When, however, as the result of a Review, it is determined that the student has not resolved the concerns to the satisfaction of the School of Social Work, a meeting of faculty in the School will be held to determine if the case should be referred for formal disciplinary action, or a recommendation should be made to the Vice-President (Academic & Research) that a student be dismissed from a course or field placement, or be required to withdraw from the School.

5. Right of Appeal

Students who wish to appeal may do so by submitting a written appeal, care of the Registrar, to the Senate Admissions and Academic Standing Committee. Appeals should be based on substantial medical or compassionate reasons with supporting documentation.