Rajagiri Journal of Social Development
Vol. 15, No. 1, January-June 2023: 20-25
DOI: 10.5958/2583-7087.2023.00005.6

IndianJournals.com
A product of Diva Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.

Research Article

Social Work Field Education: Manuals Suggested Learning Outcomes

Shaurya Prakash[1,2], Kheyali Roy[1,2]* and Subhashree Sanyal[3]

[1]Assistant Professor, Gopal Narayan Singh University, Sasaram Bihar, India
[2]Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, West Bengal, India
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, West Bengal, India

***Corresponding Author**
kheyaliroy9@gmail.com

Keywords
Social work field education, field education manual, accrediting body, learning outcomes, professional identity

Field education is an integral part of social work education that equips social work students with professional skills and competencies. Field education, the signature pedagogy of social work education, facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge and understanding into practice. However, signature pedagogy undergoes continuous revisions to make the social work profession more fully attuned to the diversity of clients. This article describes findings from a review of field education manuals or frameworks of four universities in four countries: India, the United States, Australia and Canada. A comparison of the field learning outcomes proposed by the universities confirmed the common goals of achieving a professional identity through ethical and competent training. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for a structured manual for field training to ensure the exposure of social work students to diverse populations and their needs and to design and deliver bespoke services under adequate supervision.

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026

INTRODUCTION

Social work, a practice-based profession (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2014), necessitates theoretical and practical training. For students to become professional social workers, both forms of learning must occur inside and outside the university or classrooms. In social work education, practical training is through field education. Field education is social work education's 'signature pedagogy' (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008, p. 8, 2015, p. 12), wherein students learn to integrate theory into practice. Fieldwork is an excellent way for social work students to combine their academic knowledge with real-world experience and skills (Rahman and Islam, 2015). It fulfils the requirements of learning via practice.

Social work field education, also known as field placement or practicum, is a crucial component of social work education. The Global Standards for Social Work Education (GSSWE) calls this practice education (IFSW, 2020). Field education takes place through concurrent and block placements. The primary goal of field education is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by allowing students to gain hands-on experience working with individuals, families, groups, and communities. It is impossible to dispute the importance of field experience in shaping future social workers. Fieldwork experiences are critical to developing social workers' skills and competencies (Ajibo *et al.,* 2017). Social work students' transition from classroom learning to learning through field practicum facilitates their entry into the working world of the profession.

Social work students can undertake field placements in various settings, such as hospitals, schools, mental health clinics, community organisations, child welfare agencies, correctional facilities and advocacy groups. The specific placement depends on the student's area of interest and the requirements of their programme. Field education is guided by specific learning objectives designed to align with the social work programme's curriculum and accreditation standards. These objectives typically focus on developing and refining practice skills, including assessment, intervention, advocacy, case management, cultural competency and ethical decision-making.

Field placements involve close supervision from qualified social work professionals. Field supervisors, who are experienced social workers, provide regular guidance, feedback and support to students throughout their placement. They help students integrate theory into

practice, reflect on their experiences and navigate ethical and professional challenges. In addition, it involves ongoing evaluation and assessment of student's progress and performance. Supervisors conduct regular evaluations, observing and reviewing students' practice skills, knowledge application, and professional conduct. Students may also engage in self-assessment and reflection activities to enhance their learning.

GSSWE proposes that social work schools worldwide prepare a comprehensive field education manual and make it available to students and supervisors. In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC) issued a Learning Outcome-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF), which specifies the learning outcomes of field practicum in terms of academic aptitude, personal and professional aptitude, and societal aptitude (UGC, 2019). Against this background, this article describes the results of a review of the field education curriculum of four leading universities in different parts of the world.

METHOD

This study reviewed the field education manuals of four universities under different accrediting bodies to compare the learning objectives/outcomes of field education in the social work education they offer. The universities considered were (1) Delhi University, accredited by India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), (2) Boston University, where the School of Social Work has CSWE accreditation, (3) University of Queensland, where social work education accrediting body is Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and (4) University of Calgary, where the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) is the accrediting body. This review used online

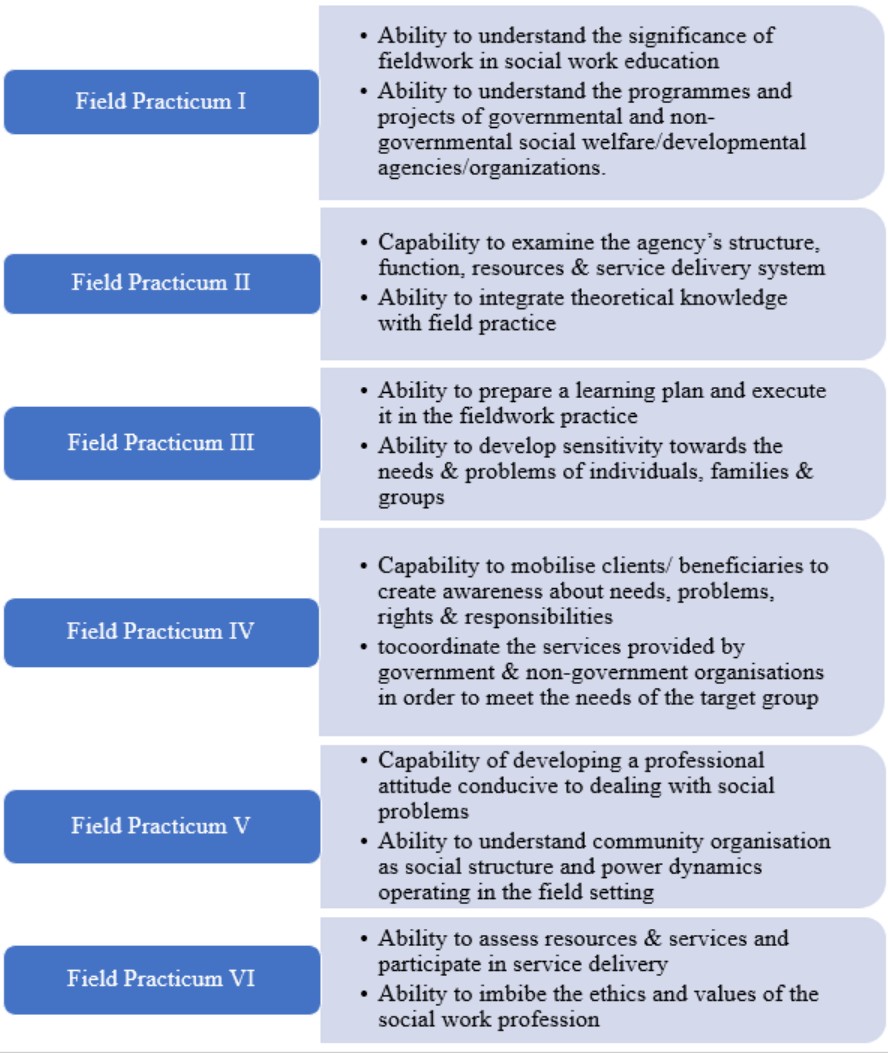


Figure 1: Learning Outcomes of Field Practicum
Source: University of Delhi (2019)

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026

copies of the field education manuals uploaded by the selected universities. Researchers individually reviewed the downloaded data and collated results.

RESULTS

University of Delhi

University of Delhi in India published an LOCF for Bachelors with Honours in Social Work in 2019. In their programme, four days a week are for classroom teaching and two days for field practicum. The field is a social welfare or development agency or open community setting. These settings provide opportunities for students to interact with clients and client systems and to apply social work methods, principles, skills, and techniques. Field practicum is under the guidance of a faculty supervisor from the college and a practitioner from the agency. Figure 1 shows the field practicum learning outcomes specified by the University of Delhi.

Boston University

Boston University (BU) is an urban university; Therefore, the School of Social Work at BU is concerned with urban problems and their impact on people. The primary purpose of the field education experience is to enable students to practice social work. Field education helps students to translate theoretical concepts, principles and research evidence into practice, and they apply this to work with clients such as individuals, families, groups, communities and organisations (Boston University, n.d.).

BU curriculum describes field education learning objectives under four core areas; social work identity within the social work profession, student as social work intern, foundation practice skills and advanced practice skills. In understanding the agency, students have to identify the role of urban social work in the agency. Moreover, they have to assess the assets, capabilities and needs of the communities served by the agency and the productive role of the agency in those communities. The trainees must recognise and appreciate the differences and similarities in diverse populations' values, experiences, beliefs, strengths and needs. In addition, the curriculum directs students to practice the NASW (National Association of Social Workers, the professional organisation of social workers in the United States) Code of Ethics. Figure 2 shows the field education learning outcomes set by BU.

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026

Social Work Identity Within The Social Work Profession	Understanding agency Context Recognise Values and Ethics Appreciate Diverse Populations Promote Social and Economic Justice
The Student As Social Work Intern	Professional behaviour Participation in the supervision process Critical thinking Communication
Foundation Practice Skills	Develop Professional relationships Demonstrate Practice skills Use of models of practice Use of theories Interaction with individuals and families Working with groups Working with communities and organisations
Advanced Practice Skills	Clinical practice with a Macro sub-specialisation Clinical Social Work and Behavioral Medicine Family Therapy Group Work Gerontological Social Work Human Service Management Trauma care

Figure 2: Field Education Learning Outcomes
Source: Boston University (n.d.)

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026

The University of Queensland

The field placements are structured learning opportunities integral to the social work programme and occur within the AASW requirements as the professional accrediting body (University of Queensland, 2021). They provide real-life experience for implementing learning in diverse and complex social and political contexts. Moreover, field placement is a collaborative process involving students, field educators and field tutors to contribute to emerging practitioners' educational and professional development.

Figure 3 shows field education's core themes and learning objectives as suggested by the Field Education Manual of the University of Queensland.

University of Calgary

CASWE accredits the University of Calgary's BSW and MSW programmes. CASWE (2021) states, 'Field Education is a critical and distinctive aspect of social work education and takes place in the context of field education practicums. The purpose of field education is to integrate theory and practice, enabling students to further develop, refine, and enhance the values, knowledge, and skills reflective of the core learning objectives' (p. 12). Figure 4 shows the core learning objectives outlined by CASWE.

The Office of Field Education at the University of Calgary ensures that 'students are provided with agency-based experiences that maximise opportunities for learning and application of social work values, knowledge, and skills' (University of Calgary, 2020, p. 10). At this university, social work learning encompasses knowing, understanding, doing and being. The field education model links classroom learning and field experiences to enhance students' abilities to integrate theory and practice.

DISCUSSION

Combining classroom learning and field education is paramount to developing a professional self. The circular merging of classroom concepts into the performance in the field, followed by the processing of competencies in the

Figure 3: Core Themes and Learning Objectives of Field Education
Source: The University of Queensland (2021)

Core themes	Learning objectives
➢ Promoting social inclusion and redressing marginalisation and exclusion ➢ Developing leadership qualities ➢ Locating human services in the contemporary environment ➢ Reconceptualising social work as a profession with permeable boundaries ➢ Engaging with diversity and uncertainty ➢ Taking an international perspective ➢ Focusing on information technology	➢ Demonstrate the consistent application of the AASW Code of Ethics (2010) and AASW Practice Standards (2013) to all aspects of practice in the placement agency. ➢ Identify how the interventions offered by the placement agency reflect its social policy base, the targeted needs, and areas for improving the service provision/agency outreach to the target population. ➢ Apply an emerging framework of ethical, knowledge and skills bases for beginning social work practice through linking practice and theory. ➢ Demonstrate effective, purposeful, culturally appropriate communication and interpersonal skills in engaging with service users and colleagues. ➢ Identify links between individual problems and structural patterns of power in terms of the skills and knowledge required for effective anti-oppressive practice. ➢ Demonstrate professionalism, collegiality and integrity in workplace practices. ➢ Respect and strive to understand and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures. ➢ Supervise to identify and account for the emotional and assumptive responses to placement incidents, tensions and challenges.



Figure 4: Core Learning Objectives of Field Education
Source: CASWE (2021)

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026

classroom environment, demonstrates bi-directional learning conducive to professional growth (Olson-Morrison *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, the potential of social work education to graduate ethical and competent effective social workers is highly dependent on the quality of field education (Amadasun, 2021). Fieldwork is laboratory work for social work students to understand the complexity of human behaviour, social structures, mechanisms of inequality and many such topics (Nair *et al.,* 2019).

This review results demonstrate that field education shares objectives across the globe. Filed work manuals of universities from different parts of the world outline the outcomes from a global perspective of the professional growth of students, specifying the need to respect diversity. Moreover, these all instruct students to practice within the code of ethics. These results confirm the knowledge sharing of the social work profession worldwide. However, indigenous methods are essential for field education. The University of Calgary and the University of Queensland highlight the need to identify social work practices for working with Aboriginal people.

Exposure to diversity strengthens social work skills and competencies (Gearing *et al.,* 2023). However, one of the most incredible opportunities and challenges of field training is meeting and working with different people (Baird and Mollen, 2023). Social workers who help people overcome domestic violence, mental illness, homelessness, poverty and other problems may face workplace threats, verbal abuse and physical and emotional aggression. This problem is particularly acute in many geographic areas with a critical shortage of qualified mental health providers or health providers (NASW, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the possible risks associated with the occupation and the laws and rules intended to safeguard social workers. For example, the bipartisan Protecting Social Workers and Health Professionals from Workplace Violence Act (S.4412 - 117th Congress, 2021–2022) has provisions for funding safety measures for social workers. Hence, the training for social work trainees must include topics such as risk factor assessment, crisis management, situational awareness and violence management.

India is a country of diversity and inequality. Therefore, designing social work field education encompassing all field setting categories is essential. Moreover, exposure to a diverse population can strengthen the professional competencies of social work students. However, the absence of an accrediting body for social work education in India is a concern. Despite this, preparing fieldwork manuals to follow can help Indian social work schools to excel in equipping social work students with professional ethics and competencies.

REFERENCES

Ajibo H, Mbah F and Anazonwu N. (2017). Fieldwork Practice in Social Work. In: Okoye U, Chukwu N and Agwu P (Eds). *Social Work in Nigeria: Book of Readings*. pp. 104–113. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.

Amadasun S. (2021). Is the Signature Pedagogy Still Worthwhile? An Empirical Study of Field Practice Experience among Social Work Students in Nigeria. *Social Work Education*, *40* (2), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2020.1771300

Baird BN and Mollen D. (2023). *The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook: A Guide for the Helping Professions*. Taylor & Francis.

Boston University. *Curriculum Guide for Field Education* (21st Edition). https://www.bu.edu/ssw/files/pdf/curriculum guide211.pdf

CASWE. (2021). *Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards For Canadian Social Work Education*. EPAS-2021-1.pdf (caswe-acfts.ca)

CSWE. (2008). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Microsoft Word - TAB A - 2008 EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND ACCREDITATION STANDARDS (EPAS) -08-24-2012 (fau.edu)

CSWE. (2015). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Council on Social Work Education. https://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Accreditatio n-Process/2015-EPAS/2015EPAS_Web_FINAL.pdf.aspx

Gearing RE, Washburn M, Savani S, Mytelka C, Carr LC, Robinson A, Clark D and Robbins SP. (2023). Strengthening Social Work Skills and Competency Through Exposure to Diversity. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 12(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2023.2199049

IFSW. (2020, August 1). Global Standards For Social Work Education And Training. Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training – International Federation of Social Workers (ifsw.org)

IFSW. (2014). Global Definition of Social Work. Global Definition of Social Work – International Federation of Social Workers (ifsw.org)

Nair R, Juvva S and Nadkarni VV. (Eds) (2019). *Field Instruction in Social Work Education: The Indian Experience*. Taylor & Francis. India.

NASW. (2022). Protecting Social Workers and Health Professionals from Workplace Violence Act (S. 4412/H.R. 8492). Issue Brief. Layout 1 (socialworkers.org)

Olson-Morrison D, Radohl T and Dickey G. (2019). Strengthening Field Education: An Integrated Model for Signature Pedagogy in Social Work. *In Sight: A Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, *14*, 55–73. Volume 14 FINAL 07.11.19.pdf (ed.gov)

S.4412 - 117th Congress. (2021–2022): Protecting Social Workers and Health Professionals from Workplace Violence Act (2022, June 15). https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/4412/all-info

Rahman S and Islam MN. (2015). Field Practice in Social Work: Practitioners' Opinion. *The Journal of Social Development*, *27* (1), 55-65. Field-Practice-in-Social-Work-Practitioners-Opinion.pdf (researchgate.net)

The University of Queensland. (2021). *Social Work Field Education Manual 2021*. Social Work Field Education Manual (uq.edu.au)

UGC. (2019). *The Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)/Bachelor of Arts Honors (BA Honors) Undergraduate Programme: A Template*. 1366718_Social_Work.pdf (ugc.gov.in)

University of Calgary. (2020). *Field Education Policy Manual (2020)*. Summary of Required Time in Foundational Field Practicum (Social Work 633) (ucalgary.ca)

University of Delhi. (2019). *Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework for Bachelors With Honors in Social Work*. 26042019_Social.pdf (du.ac.in)

How to cite this article: Prakash S, Roy K and Sanyal S. (2023). Social Work Field Education: Manuals Suggested Learning Outcomes. *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development, 15* (1), 20-25.

www.IndianJournals.com
Not for Commercial Use
Downloaded From IP - 216.73.216.190 on dated 14-Nov-2026