

**February 5, 2019**

## **Summary and Action**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the YEAR I practicum forum is to dialogue with students – comments, recommendations and concerns - regarding the PROCESS utilized at the FIFSW regarding YEAR I practicum assignments. YEAR I practicums run approximately 67 days, January – May.

Each academic year, in the month following the commencement of YEAR I practicums, students are invited to a discussion with practicum staff.

Approximately 25 students attended the forum in February 2019. Students also brought forward comments from those who were not in attendance.

### **A. Summary of students' comments**

1. A recurring theme was the FIFSW use of the Practicum Administration System (PAS) as the system for assigning practicums. Concern was stated about the “randomness” of the assignments; the impersonal nature of the process – not taking into account students’ interests and preferences; the limitations of the selections; the lack of acknowledgement of a student’s experiences and preferences; and the large number of students who are not matched after the algorithm is run.
2. Comments related to students seeking their own practicum.
3. Further comments referred to the added anxiety of allowing students to trade their PAS assigned practicum.
4. A suggestion was made that each student be assigned with a Practicum staff to meet before and/ or during the assignment process.

**NOTE:** The PAS is the practicum assignment system that has been used by the FIFSW since the early 2000’s. Over the years, the PAS has been refined many times. Following consultation with external and internal stakeholders, the PAS was deemed the optimum method for fair, equitable and unbiased practicum assignments. The PAS continues to be the assignment vehicle for both YEAR I and YEAR II/Advanced standing cohorts at the FIFSW. While the self-directed opportunities may appear, to some, to be limiting, the PAS offers each student the autonomy to self-select according to their priorities. The Practicum Office communicates the schedule for all, in order to minimize any unfair advantage.

Regarding the request to find one's own practicum: this will not change but modifications explained below will be implemented. As articulated at the Information Sessions and at the Forum, partner organizations have set out guidelines and protocol for the Practicum Office. Students' individual circumstances will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**ACTION:**

The Practicum Office, within its scope, is able to make the following modifications:

1. More information about the PAS algorithm will be included in the Practicum Manual.
2. The FIFSW, with input from students, will design a short video for the FIFSW Practicum web page, with a link to it on the FIFSW Admissions web page. The video will complement the current information in the Practicum Manual and the FAQ sections of the website. *The Practicum Office is seeking participants for a time limited working group on video development*
3. The Practicum Office will add a Practicum Information session near the start of the semester as well as hold an information session in October.
4. Students matched by the PAS are confirmed in their practicum.
5. Students not matched will continue to revisit the PAS to submit additional selections. New and remaining practicums are available. Seeking one's own practicum may not be necessary.
6. Students not matched or have traded their assigned practicum with someone who did not have a practicum ( and are temporarily unmatched):
  - Will meet with a Practicum Office staff upon the student's request;
  - May meet with Practicum Office staff to explore feasibility of practicums not listed on the PAS. If the practicum meets the FIFSW standards, the interview/practicum will be assigned to the student who brought the suggestion forward. Students may not reach out to organizations before consultation with the Practicum Office.
7. The Practicum Office will reach out to more competitive practicum sites and advertise these opportunities widely. The communication platforms will include the website, emails and information session(s). Students who are offered a "competitive" practicum and accept the practicum offer before the PAS is open do not participate in the PAS process.

**B. Discussion about the format of the Learning Contract and the Evaluation Tools.**

Students commented on the lack of clarity on the learning contract.

**ACTION:**

8. To discuss revisions to the format of the learning contract, a time limited working group with students and field instructors. *The Practicum Office is seeking participants.*
9. More information will be provided in the Practicum Manual regarding the reliability and validity of the Evaluation Tool.