

COVID-19 FAQs

From the March 25 Student Community Meeting

MSW Courses

What is the current plan for Summer 2020 courses?

Summer courses at FIFSW and across U of T will be proceeding as scheduled but remotely. The online format used for class lectures and discussions (i.e. Zoom or Microsoft Teams) will be determined by the course instructors.

Is it possible to modify expectations or extend the deadline for Fall 2020 final course assignments?

We are aware that a number of students may now be experiencing heightened stress for various reasons related to employment, family, childcare and/or other aspects of life. Assignment modification and/or coursework extensions consistent with the standards set forth by the University are specific ways our faculty is providing support to students during these unprecedented times while balancing the need to meet critical course learning objectives in order for you to meet the graduation standards set forth by CASWE.

The processes available to modify the method of evaluation in a course are outlined in the University's assessment and grading practices policy. In order to maintain equity and fairness, a simple majority vote is required to alter assignments. In cases where assignments have been modified, instructors have been guided by these equitable standards.

We support the discretion of our instructors to make assignment modifications that both alleviate burden and continue to assess critical course learning objectives. Students who still feel unable to meet modified course requirements can request coursework extensions and are encouraged to consult immediately with their instructor(s).

Will the format or length of intensive summer courses change?

We are moving forward with the schedule as planned. We will utilize available resources to help plan summer intensive courses and will do our best to deliver them in a way that is as manageable as possible.

Since the practicum will no longer be occurring in May, can we take an extra summer course?

MSW students who wish to exercise this option will be able to do so. We are working with the School of Graduate Studies to move the maximum course enrolment in the Summer session for full-time students from three to four half-credit courses. Practicum SWK4701H will remain on your record if you are a first-year student, but you will now be able to enrol in up to three more courses instead of two. To foster equity, all students will be able to enrol in one additional course as of March 30, 2020 at 12pm. Please note that we cannot guarantee space in any particular course and that enrolment will proceed on a first-come, first-served basis. On March 31, at 12pm, students wanting to add another course will be able to do so for courses that are still available. This second-tier enrolment opportunity would also proceed on a first-come, first-served basis, pending space available.

(Please note that for PhD students, the course requirements are different.)

If Practicum is ending earlier, will this affect our course workload in the summer?

At present, we are trying to figure out what is possible. We will respond to this question when we can.

Will you consider extending the semester due to practicum disruptions and/or to allow for students to adjust to this new normal?

Our priority and the University's priority is to get you through your program on time. There is no talk at this time of extending the semester. This is important to avoid disruptive ripple effects into the summer and fall.

PhD Students

What is happening with REB applications and reviews for studies with in-person components?

During this crisis, the University is prioritizing certain types of research to happen on campus. The studies must be COVID related and approved by the U of T's Incident Management Team.

Off campus research can continue if there is no direct contact with participants. If this requires a change to an approved protocol or consent procedures, you must file an amendment. If you have a project that is currently approved for off campus and non-direct participant contact that now will involve an amendment that is COVID related, please inform the REB at ethics.review@utoronto.ca when you submit the amendment (so they can prioritize it).

On March 25, we were informed by Rachel Zand of the Office of Research Ethics that they have reviewers and will now take on new protocols that are off-campus and do not involve direct contact with participants. However, these will be relegated to secondary level of importance at this time.

Finally, if there is any change in your study procedures related to personally identifiable information (such as moving data in a way that was not approved in your protocol), this will require an amendment. (Please see the REB webpage for information on what is considered personally identifiable.) However, if you are moving data that is not personally identifiable, please just include this in your annual report.

For other details and updates, please visit [the Office of VP of Research and Innovation website](#).

Graduation

What is happening with graduation?

Students who complete their degree requirements will still graduate and receive their degrees. Unfortunately, the latest guidance indicates that the need for physical distancing to limit or slow the spread of the virus will continue for some time. It is for this reason that [U of T has made the difficult decision to cancel all Convocation ceremonies for the Spring 2020 season](#), previously scheduled to take place from June 2-19.

Will graduation dates be affected?

No. The University is committed to ensuring that students complete their term. Academic continuity in terms of teaching, research, and other business is a key objective during this time.

Finances

Is there emergency financial help for students experiencing hardship? Could you explain the process of applying for SGS Emergency Grants and Loans?

SGS Emergency Grants and Loans are available for students who may be experiencing unexpected financial hardship.

The SGS Emergency Grant program aims to assist currently registered, full-time graduate students who encounter an unanticipated serious financial emergency. Information on eligibility and the application process can be found [here](#).

The SGS Emergency Loan alleviates temporary cash flow problems for students who are expecting the release of funds in the near future (i.e., 30 to 120 days) from employment, a major award instalment, OSAP (Ontario Students' Assistance Program), teaching assistantship, or research assistantship payment, etc. Information on eligibility and how to apply can be found [here](#).

Are there any other funds available to students at this time?

Students registered with Accessibility Services may connect with their Advisor to discuss funding that may be available for disability-related services and/or equipment (e.g. adaptive technology, academic/ADHD coaching, mental health counselling, etc.).

All internal FIFSW award funding (scholarships and bursaries) for the 2019-2020 Academic session has been disbursed for this academic year. Students will receive their assigned funding in January 2020.

Will our 2020-2021 tuition be affected?

The fees for next year are not available at this time. The detailed fee schedules that list the tuition, ancillary and incidental fees for students for the Fall-Winter sessions are posted on the U of T Student Accounts website by mid-July.

Knowing that many students will now be out of summer work opportunities, is it possible that tuition might be made more accessible to students next year?

We do not have information on tuition fees at this time. However, the Ontario government recently announced that it is in suspending student loan (OSAP) payments and interest charges from March 30 to September 30. During this deferral, payments will not be withdrawn from your account if you are on pre-authorized debit. If you make payments through online banking or cheque, you are not required to send in payments due during this period.

Can scholarship applications be released earlier on to help us prepare for finances for the year?

Yes. It is possible for Internal Social Work award decisions for registered students to be made earlier. However, recipients of awards would not receive funding until after registration in the Fall session, and funding would go towards tuition.

Practicum

Future semesters

What is happening with summer practicums?

To ensure academic continuity as per U of T directives, we will be moving forward with summer practicums. At this point, they will be taking place remotely.

How might second year practicum be affected? Will there be any modifications for the second-year placement starting in September?

We are continuing to recruit field instructors for the fall. At present, the decisions from CASWE and U of T to reduce the hours required for accreditation and to pause on-site activities only affect current (winter) practicums.

What if the location of our summer placement was deemed an essential service?

The expectation is that you would still complete your practicum remotely. This is the directive we have received from the University.

Volunteer opportunities

Can practicum time be used for volunteering if this is approved by our field instructor? For example, mental health helplines, such as Kids Helpline, have seen a significant increase in calls. Do we have the option of supporting organizations like these for the remainder of our practicum hours and could the University help match us with a placement like this?

It is commendable that our students would offer support. Accreditation standards require practicums to be supervised and evaluated by a social worker. The OCSWSSW Code of Ethics requires social workers to self-determine their competencies. A field Instructor must therefore determine whether they are competent and available to supervise and evaluate a student in the proposed activity. If you know of a social worker who would be willing to be a Field Instructor, please let us know.

For those considering volunteer opportunities independent of practicum, please refer to [the University's guidelines](#).

Practicum hours

Because our practicum hours have been reduced this year, will we be required to complete more hours than usual next year?

No. Both FIFSW and CASWE will recognize the revised practicum hours that have been set.

When in-person practicum starts again, will 2-year MSW students be able to increase their attendance to 5 days per week (rather than 4)?

In the fall and winter semesters, Practicum II occurs three days a week. Monday and Tuesday are protected for classes. When classes cease on Mondays and Tuesdays, there is flexibility regarding the number of days per week of practicum. All modifications to the schedule must have approval of the supervisor (and EC if there is one.) The Faculty-Field Liaison and the Practicum Office must receive a copy of the revised schedule so that adjustments can be made to the online evaluation tool.

As per the CASWE's recommendation, why did the faculty decide not to have Year 1 students complete their remaining hours in a future practicum?

FIFSW and U of T are committed to moving students through the program with as little disruption as possible. Completing Practicum I hours in Practicum II would not allow for this.

Why was the final day of practicum moved up an entire month?

The final day of practicum was based on the number of hours that CASWE determined as the new minimum hours in Practicum I.

Will the revised hours during this period be recognized elsewhere? Will they affect our eligibility to work in other countries?

While it is important for students to be aware of the specific licencing requirements in jurisdictions where they may have future employment, it is important to note that once you receive your transcript and graduate, your degree is valid. No one is going to question that. Remember that social work students are being similarly affected everywhere.

Remote learning vs. in-person experience

Could first year students who are doing a summer or winter practicum participate in direct practice at a later time?

The Practicum Office and FIFSW must follow the remote learning directives of the University. FIFSW and U of T are committed to moving students through the program with as little disruption as possible. Completing summer or winter practicum hours in a future semester would not allow for this.

Could our year 2 practicum be extended for students who wish to receive more in-person experience?

The Practicum Office and FIFSW must follow the remote learning directives of the University. It is important to note that social work learning is an ongoing, life-long process. We encourage you to continue to pursue new in-person experiences over the course of your career.

How is the Faculty addressing the fact that we will not be getting the in-person experience we need to develop competencies as social workers?

As you know, given the current situation, we have no choice but to employ remote learning opportunities. This is the new normal everywhere. We hope you can take heart in the fact that social work learning is an ongoing, life-long process. Even if you receive the best two-year education possible, you will continue to learn more through new opportunities as you move into the workforce.

Remote learning plans

When are we expected to submit our remote learning plans to our Field Instructors?

Please send it to them as soon as possible. If your Field Instructor is not available contact your Faculty Field Liaison.

How will the final evaluations for Practicum I be addressed if we have not been attending? Should the activities in our remote learning plan address every one of the competencies (learning and growth, behaviour in the organization, clinical relationships, and so on)? I am finding that not all can be done remotely.

The evaluation tool for Practicum I will be revised to better address remote learning.

Field instructors

What should I do if my Field Instructor is unavailable or has limited availability to supervise?

Faculty Field Liaisons have been asked to identify situations where a Field Instructor cannot follow through with supervision or evaluations. Notify your Faculty Field Liaison and work with them to determine your Field Instructor's availability. Your Faculty Field Liaison will notify the Practicum Office, which will work to find a new Field Instructor to advise you. Developing a remote learning plan is to be done of practicum time.

Paused placements

Students at UHN have had their practicum paused until April 4. Will students in this circumstance have their practicum extended for two weeks because of this?

The Practicum Office is looking for other opportunities for students in this situation and asks that they develop a remote learning plan. Please contact your Faculty Field Liaison and keep track of your hours as the Practicum Office recruits a field instructor to support you during this final phase. Our goal is to minimize disruption to your program while observing CASWE requirements of 337.5 hours of field education.