

Messages and FAQs

From the May 13 Student Community Meeting

A message from the Dean

Thirty years ago, I sat where you are sitting as a MSW student. I found my education invigorating. I learned a great deal about social work, but I was left with the feeling that I needed to learn a lot more, with lingering questions about my readiness and competency to function as a social worker.

Even after receiving my degree from the top school of social work in the United States, I still felt like an imposter. I thought I didn't know everything I needed to know to begin my career. I even turned down a job supervising BSW social workers in New York City because I felt I wasn't ready. Now after teaching social work for more than two decades, I have learned that this is a common and normal feeling for the base majority of students — even under seemingly ideal circumstances.

The MSW degree is intended to teach you to think critically about practice, not teach you about everything that you will need to do in practice. This knowledge will come over time. I can let you know that the professional community consistently reports that our graduates are well prepared. I personally encourage each one of you to be gentle and kind to yourself in your professional and personal growth, which will be as a life-long process.

While remote learning presents certain challenges, it also provides unique educational opportunities that will help inform your professional career, particularly in our quickly changing world. In these exceptional times, we are working diligently to provide our students with high-quality practicum experiences, stronger and more flexible systems of course delivery, and creative opportunities to network and participate in the life of the school.

We will continue to keep the lines of communication open through monthly student community meetings, our weekly student e-digest, open office hours and semester updates from the Dean's office. I'd like to emphasize that we remain committed to providing you any new information we receive from the University in real time.

COVID-19 has accelerated within weeks, the types of societal change that would typically evolve over several decades. How we adapt during these times is part of the learning experience for all of us. It is a challenge that, through support and ingenuity, I am confident we can overcome.

Updates

Increased course offerings

We have increased the enrolment for your summer course load, and are hoping this will provide you with some flexibility with the scope of courses you are able to take. We are also offering more courses than usual for you to take in the fall. The timing of the additional course offerings will not interfere with the Wednesday to Friday practicum times.

Fall Orientation

Orientation for new students in the fall will be offered online. We are working to design remote orientation events and session that are thoughtful and engaging. A committee of students and faculty members will help ensure that this year's orientation events are welcoming and informative and contribute to the development of a sense of community among our new students.

Simulation learning

Assistant Professor Toula Kourgiantakis, our current simulation coordinator is stepping down from this role in June, and we are hiring new coordinator, who will be responsible for integrating simulation online. Prof. Kourgiantakis started implementing [Practice Fridays](#) online for the first time in April. This online initiative provides students with the opportunity to gain experience and practice providing remote support for clients (represented by trained actors), and is an extension of FIFSW's leading work in simulation-based learning.

Fall practicums

In February, we began recruitment for fall practicums; however, due to COVID-19, situations have changed for many of the Field Instructors that we normally work with. We have restarted our recruitment activities and are currently working with organizations across the GTA and beyond to develop placements that will provide you with real-world professional experience, even if remote.

We plan to have information on available placements up on our database in July and will let all students know when this information is available.

The following changes have been made to increase flexibility for our students:

- The number of required hours in practicum were significantly reduced
- There is increased flexibility in start dates in the fall semester
- Off-schedule practicums, including those that can start before the fall semester are listed on our website under [Current Practicum Opportunities](#)
- Remote learning activities are on the Practicum website for students to consider and discuss with their field instructor
- Volunteering and practicums in places of employment will be considered if conditions are met to maintain integrity

FAQS

(Note: questions answered in previous meetings are not included below. Links to the FAQs from previous meetings can be found [here](#).)

Course and general program information

Will remote learning continue in the Fall semester?

At present, we have no clearance to move to in-person classes in the fall. There is a high likelihood that online learning will continue to be required. As a result, we are planning to deliver our programs remotely. We will know for certain in June or July and will share this information as soon as it is available.

If fall courses are online, would students who live outside Toronto need to be in Toronto for the fall 2020 semester or could we complete the semester in our hometown and move if/when campus opens in Winter 2021?

If classes are online (which we are preparing for), you don't need to be physically present in Toronto. We will know for certain whether classes will be online in June or July and will share this information as soon as it is available.

I am a 6th year PhD student who must complete and defend my thesis by the end of August. Unfortunately, I find am less efficient due to the COVID-19 situation, and am very worried that I may not be done by the end of the summer. Will I have to pay tuition if I defend in September/October 2020. Is there any way to waive the tuition in case I need it?

SGS sets up the enrollment deadline and the pay schedule. In a recent communication from SGS, the procedures for students to receive a tuition fee exemption were specified:

Students who were making good research progress prior to COVID-19, who demonstrate that their academic progress was significantly impeded due to pandemic-related disruption and require additional time beyond the program length to complete their program requirements, may apply for extended registration with an exemption from tuition for up to one academic session. This duration may be re-assessed as the situation evolves.

- *Criteria for Providing a Tuition Fee Exemption*
 - I. *Students were making good progress with their thesis/dissertation prior to COVID-19 and data collection or access to necessary sources has been significantly impeded due to pandemic-related impacts (e.g., labs closed, fieldwork cancelled, access to materials, archives or library sources has been impeded, personal circumstances).*
 - II. *Additional work is needed before the thesis/dissertation can be defended (e.g., insufficient data or material).*

- III. *All feasible alternative academic activities (e.g., writing of sections of thesis/dissertation or publications, coursework, professional development) have been completed.*
- IV. *The revised research plan will require additional time.*
- V. *Supervisory committee agrees that conditions (i) through (iv) have been met.*
- VI. *Departmental/SGS approval.*

Please contact Faculty Registrar, Sharon Bewell, and PhD Program Director, Lin Fang, if you have other questions.

Is it possible to let us know in advance the format that will be used for individual online courses?

The delivery method of each course is determined by the instructor. Some set formal class times when students are required to attend. Others take a hybrid approach, which includes both live class time and asynchronous learning content. Select courses will be offered completely asynchronously in that there will be no set class time. The approach that they take may depend on the content that they must deliver. Our professors are receiving ongoing training to help them best plan their course, enhance student experience and address learning needs.

We have asked the instructors to provide us with information on their course delivery method so that we can list this in the timetable in advance of June 8th, when students may start signing up for courses.

Could a zoom meeting be organized for students the mental health and health stream?

Yes. The coordinator has agreed to this.

When will Ontario Graduate Scholarship application decisions be made?

The School of Graduate Studies, which administers the award, will contact the recipients of the award around the end of June or beginning of July.

Will social work networking opportunities continue in the fall?

We will certainly facilitate this. The Graduate Student Association (GSA) will be planning social/networking events throughout the year and will send out emails as well as Facebook updates about those events. They are looking to do some events online over the summer months. If you would like to submit ideas, please contact the GSA directly.

Is there an option for students entering 2nd year to defer their second year until fall 2021?

Once you are a student, you have the opportunity to take a leave of absence for up to three terms, so this would be possible. When you are on leave, you do not pay any fees.

If you decide to take a leave of absence and you are a current student, you will need to notify us by the end of August. We advise you consult with your advisor so they can walk you through the implications of this decision.

Practicum

Is it possible for us to defer our practicums?

We are working diligently to ensure that practicum experiences in the fall are as high quality as possible. The reality is that this virus has changed how we all live and operate – including those providing service as social workers. Please note that our accrediting body has reduced the number of hours required to 337.5 to allow for increased flexibility in terms of when the practicums can start. As a result, even if you aren't able to start your practicum until November, it will be possible to complete all the hours required by April.

Regardless, we understand that there may be exceptional circumstances that compel you to seek deferring your practicum to a later semester, and there will be an application process to do this if there is good reason to do so.

Can the online activities/training sessions that the practicum office has shared be counted towards the fall practicum if the Field Instructor approves?

If your Field Instructor approves this, then yes.

Will it be possible to do an in-person practicum placement in the fall?

We are required to take direction from the University with regards to whether we can permit in-person placements. As soon as we know whether in-person placements are permitted, we will let our students know. At present, we are planning for remote placements.

Is it possible that we would start with remote placements in the fall but transition to in-person placements later in the semester if it is deemed safe to do so?

Yes, this is possible, subject to guidelines from the University and the Field Instructor.

If can secure a practicum placement in own community can I stay in my community in the winter?

This is reasonable and we are completely flexible with regards to this request. If courses would also be offered remotely, there would be no need for you to be in Toronto. An unknown at this point is when the university will approve online practicums.

Why are students being asked to consider completing their practicum II at hospitals with paused student placements statuses (for example UHN) and where in-person attendance is mandatory and remote supervision is not available? Could these students have the opportunity to participate in the PAS matching in order to see all available options and make a more informed decision before being asked to take the risk of being placed somewhere that will not be available if COVID-19 is still occurring in the fall?

The intent of this option is to complete as many student-field instructor matches as possible before recruitment begins. If the commitment is not made before then, the practicum offer must be available for all students to access.

Incoming students FAQs

Is there an opportunity for incoming graduate students to consult with an academic advisor prior to course enrolment on June 8th?

In terms of navigating you through the program, your Academic Advisor would normally recommend you speak to Associate Dean, Academic David Burnes or our Registrar, Sharon Bewell. To address questions of this nature, we propose a group “coffee chat” zoom meeting with David and Sharon for interested incoming students. We will email all incoming students with details shortly.

Is there a checklist for incoming students?

Your application package (i.e. offer package) includes information on next steps for incoming students. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Angela Umbrello, Administrative Coordinator, Admissions & Programs: angela.umbrello@utoronto.ca

How much is tuition and when are fees due?

The university will provide details about fees in Acorn in the middle of July. Payment of fees are requested July 20 – August 28.

When will we get a UTorID card and U of T email?

The University sets the time for students to get a T-card and U of T email. FIFSW Registrar Sharon Bewell should receive this information shortly and be able to email this information to incoming students next week. Normally, you are able to set up your T-card and email in June if you have paid your deposit. Please note that you will not need a T-Card or email to add courses in June.

We will provide information on upcoming meetings and events for incoming students — and any other information that you need related to registration and enrolment — via your current email until your U of T email is set up.