



Social Justice Studies Practicum Guide

Lakehead University

MA in Social Justice Studies

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What is a practicum?

A practicum is a type of experiential learning in which a student spends significant time working with an organization and / or individual in a setting that furthers the students' learning goals. In our case, a practicum is also a type of service learning--not simply about skill developed, but focused on doing social justice work within an organization and/or community. Because you are working towards an MA in Social Justice Studies, your practicum will need to support the efforts of a social justice serving organization, movement, or individual.

Practicums completed as partial fulfillment of the MA Degree in Social Justice at LU will consist of

- 200 Hour Field Commitment
- Successful completion of all academic requirements for SocJ 5601, as evaluated by the classroom instructor. Students will write weekly reflections, work on self-care strategies, present ideas to peers, engage in classroom discussion, and prepare a final presentation based on their placement. The course will not be as classroom intensive as other graduate seminars, but will include reading of academic journals and completing academic assignments.
- Successful completion of field work, as evaluated by the field supervisor. Field work will be different for all students; it will be worked out in the MOUs.

Students should be looking for opportunities to apply and extend the knowledge they have acquired in their coursework, as well as share their knowledge with the organization. You should be learning about the overall mission and work of the organization, with a specific emphasis on how the leadership tells the organization's story, fulfills the organization's mission, and builds relationships with staff and clients, or community and agents. Students in the Women's Studies Specialization must work with organizations or on issues where gender inequality is being addressed.

You should not be doing exclusively front line work; you may be asked to do research, literature reviews, interviews and other knowledge work that you, as a graduate student, are particularly well prepared to do. This will be applied research--similar to course work but serving the organization's needs. You might be asked to do event planning, support communication efforts, represent the organization at community meetings and events. This brief sketch of possibilities is by no means exhaustive. You will need to be proactive and creative in your efforts to serve the organization, movement or individual.

Practicums are similar to Internships, although Internships are often paid, often full time employment, and do not always come with an academic reflection.

How does the practicum fit into the MA in Social Justice?

Practicums are completed during the second year of the Program of Study (POS). Students taking the Practicum need to enroll in 5601, the Practicum Completion Course worth 1.0 FCEs, offered fall and winter each year. Students in the Practicum stream may also have to register for 9601, Continuing Practicum, in their first or second spring/summer semesters.

Students taking the Practicum Course will ideally enter the course with a signed [Memorandum of Understanding](#) between themselves and the participating organization.

Any student considering a practicum should begin working towards this option in their first semester.

Students should try to establish a working relationship with the organization of their choice by February of their second semester, and at that point complete [the program stream change form](#), which is used by the Social Justice Studies program for advising purposes, and the [Graduate Request for Program Change](#), the institutional form that will make your switch to the Practicum Stream official. The forms are also listed in section 4.

Practicums must be conducted over the fall and winter terms in order to build in the reflection, application, and new learning, and to ensure the student has appropriate academic and field supervisor support.

How do I find / choose / create a practicum placement?

Students are welcome to find their own practicum placements, but those placements must be social justice focused practicums: not front line work, but knowledge-work that applies and extends your understanding of social justice. Placements must include a willing field supervisor who has time to contribute to the practicum experience. The practicum does not need to be in Thunder Bay or Orillia, but there are advantages to working with local organizations.

SJS faculty work with, or have good relations with, a number of social justice informed organizations in the LU cities and regions, so if you do not generate your own practicum placements, consider working with one of these organizations and draw on the LU Faculty Partner to help you build that relationship if necessary.

Organization	Contact name	Contact Info	LU Faculty	Notes
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			Partner	
LU Legal Clinic	Kim Gagan	directorlucls.law@lakeheadu.ca	Brooks / Chambers	New partner.
Faye Peterson House	Deb Zweep	dzweep@fayepeterson.org	Chambers	Established partner.
Kinne-aweya Legal Clinic	Beth Ponka	PonkaB@lao.on.ca	Burnett	Established partner.
Centre for Education Research on Aging & Health	Elaine Wiersma	ewiersma@lakeheadu.ca	Dr. Elaine Wiersma	Established partner.
Thunder Bay Multicultural Association	Nicole Croes	nicolec@thunderbay.org	Brooks	Established partner.
Immigration Legal Clinic	Jen Dagsvik	jdagsvik@lakeheadu.ca	Brooks	New partner.
Gender Equity Centre (GEC)		gec@lusu.ca	Dr. Jen Chisholm, GWS	Gender Equity projects
Roots to Harvest	Erin Beagle	info@rootstoharvest.org	Dr. Barb Parker	Food Justice
NWO Women's Centre	Steph Simko, Gwen O'Reilly	gbvproject@nwo wc.org	Dr. Jenny Roth, GWS	Established partner.
Unique Get Together Society	Debra Abraham	debra@ugts.ca	Brooks	Established partner.

Students can search online portals that may have potential volunteer / practicum / experiential learning opportunities:

- Charity Village: volunteer and work opportunities. <http://charityvillage.com>
- Riipen: experiential learning opportunities: <http://riipen.com>
- Skoll Foundation's Community Job Board: <https://skoll.org/community/jobs/>

Creating a practicum is an option within the program, although it comes with minimal supervision and structure. A student looking to initiate a social justice movement, innovation, or nonprofit could do that ground work as their practicum. Ideally the student would have a mentor who can provide guidance and feedback, or a student could take on this independent work within the context of an existing movement or organization.

Students looking at social justice innovations, or any practicum experience, should explore Mitacs funding: <http://mitacs.ca>

Questions you should ask yourself as you try to determine which practicum is right for you.

1. What are your social justice interests?
2. How do these interests translate into a potential practicum placement?
3. What are your goals for the practicum? For instance, skills you want to develop, knowledge you want to build on/develop, how does this contribute/fit into my future career goals?
4. Identify the competencies and skills you think you would need to function in this area of practice?
5. Identify the stakeholders/organizations involved in this kind of work and how they fit my goals?
6. What strengths would I bring to this organization?
7. What sorts of tasks do I want to do during my practicum?
8. What sorts of tasks do I not want to do?
9. In what ways can I contribute to capacity building in this organization?

What forms do I need to fill out in order to formalize my practicum?

1. Program stream form: ideally during Fall Term of your first year. This info just goes to the SJS Program. <https://forms.gle/yvoe6ixhwCu3quoD8>
2. Lakehead University's [Graduate Request for Program Change](#). Your current Route / Option is most likely "Course Work" (default); your New Program Information will be Route / Option "Practicum." April 1 is a good target date.
3. [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) with cooperating agency, movement, or individual. Ideally before the Practicum course (August), but can be finalized in September of Practicum course if needed, and it could potentially be done early in the program.

What's the schedule for SJS Faculty, student, and field supervisor meetings?

An ideal schedule for meetings involving the student, the field supervisor, and the SocJ 5601 instructor would be as follows:

- August, or earlier, to establish and/or finalize the MOU.
- Week 2-4: make sure practicum is getting off the ground.
- Week 10: double check—any early adjustments needed?
- Week 16-18: review plan and especially deliverables.
- Week 24: attend student presentations and provide feedback.

Additional meetings as needed or requested.

What are the expectations throughout the year?

What is expected of students in a practicum setting?

- Practicum students will make a 200 hour commitment (an 8-10 hour contribution to the organization weekly for 20-25 weeks) starting in September and ending in March of a school year.
- Students will communicate in a clear and timely manner if / when they need an adjustment to that schedule.
- Students will conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner with the site staff and community members they interact with.
- Students understand that the community engaged, the organizational mission and work, is a higher priority than their own education. Students should expect a good educational experience, but must understand the success of the organization and fulfilling its mission is always the top priority.
- Students will submit a weekly reflection to the Practicum Instructor at LU that connects the field experience to previous and ongoing course work. This reflection is not shared with the field supervisor.

- Students submit a weekly work log to the field supervisor. Additional elements of this log can be identified in the MOU narratives as needed.
- Students need to be available for four meetings with the Practicum instructor and field supervisor.
- Students will sign and abide by the comprehensive “Practicum Student Placement Agreement,” separate from this MOU.

What is expected from a field supervisor?

- Available for a weekly check in (short) with student(s).
- Available once a month for a more substantial check in (10-20 minutes).
- Available for four meetings with the Practicum instructor and student (schedule in section 5).
- Communicates clearly with students and/or Practicum Instructor if work expectations are not being met.
- Communicates clearly with students and Practicum Instructor if practicum is not working out.
- Identifies and asks for social justice work, knowledge work, appropriate for graduate students.
- Attends student’s final presentation (late March or early April) and submits a final evaluation.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can I get started in the summer?

Not formally, not for credit. You may volunteer with, even work with, or in some other way build your relationship with your organization over the summer, but you cannot start banking hours towards your practicum total over the summer because the practicum is more than just the hours: it includes the reflection, the supervision, the learning that comes with the course.

Can I do this in one semester?

No. While it would be physically possible to complete 200 hours in one semester, trying to do that work in one semester would leave very little wiggle room for a late start, a change of directions, a sickness on the part of the student or supervisor, etc.. The course work is for a full year, and even though readings and presentations are front loaded, the work really needs to be spread out over the full year.

What’s the practicum course all about?

SocJ 5601 (Practicum Completion Course) helps students doing the practicum have a structure for their work, an academic advisor (the course instructor) for their placement, and a cohort for

sharing learning experiences with. The Practicum Course will also have valuable readings and skill development that help students clarify key questions and issues like:

- What it means to be a scholar-activist.
- How to do meaningful and enriching self-care.
- How to conduct Participatory Action Research.
- The nature of knowledge-work in social justice education.
- How universities should work to form and maintain ethical and reciprocal relationships with community partners.
- How universities should structure Critical Service Learning experiences.

This list is not complete and will change from year to year.

The course is front-loaded, meaning the students will meet every week during the fall term and every two weeks during the winter term.

What role does the practicum course instructor play in my field experience?

The SocJ 5601 instructor is your academic advisor for the practicum. The instructor may be in a position to help you establish your practicum and complete your MOU before the start of your Fall Term, but if not, the Social Justice Studies Program Advisor will fill that role. At times, these two roles might be held by the same person. The instructor will read and respond to your academic reflections, meet with you and your field advisor according to our program schedule, and provide additional support as needed.

What if my placement isn't going well? Can I quit?

The program would like to work with you and your placement to avoid this scenario. A good placement starts with lots of early communication up front, perhaps even some volunteering with different organizations before you commit to one organization. The practicum includes two early check-in meetings to try and get the placement started effectively, and more check ins as needed. A careful review of the MOU should be the first response to a difficult placement, a revision to the MOU should be the second response, but if problems are not corrected, a placement can potentially be broken. Much can be learned from difficult placements, and backing out of a placement should always be a last resort action. The program and its students should take every measure possible to honour our partnerships.

Who should come to my presentation?

Your classmates in SocJ 5601 will be at your practicum presentation. SocJ Affiliate Faculty and all students in the program will be invited to attend, and please ask your field supervisor to attend. You are welcome to invite friends, family, and co-workers from your placement. The real question is who shouldn't come? We can't think of anyone who would be excluded.

What comes after the practicum?

Students completing the practicum may have an opportunity to stay on with their participating organization as an employee. The SocJ program cannot guarantee that outcome, but that is

one possible scenario. Students should do a thorough reflection on the skills they have developed and tasks they have completed in order to prepare them for future work outside the academy. Practicums can lead to further studies, or directly into employment related to the cause students have been supporting. Completing a practicum and doing the academic work of the course may also position students to work in higher education as experiential learning specialists, service learning specialists, community engagement specialists, or in diversity, equity and inclusion roles.

Resource allocation and use?

Organizations that host SJS students must be able to provide appropriate work space and equipment for the students. The working environment must be safe and follow provincial and federal safety regulations. If students work from home, they should not be expected to buy materials for the practicum, use data on cell phone plans, or incur other expenses related to the practicum.