

# Payment for Placement Brief



WICHITA STATE  
UNIVERSITY

## • WSU School of Social Work •

Prepared by BreAnn Gilkey, Mia Ocean, and Rheanna Pierce

### THE PROBLEM

Practicums are the signature pedagogy in social work, yet these pivotal work-based learning opportunities are typically unpaid. At Wichita State University (WSU) alone, we estimate that the approximately 5,000 social work alumni who completed over 2.5 million practicum hours lost approximately \$23 million in wages. Social work students across the US are leading the Payment for Placement (P4P) movement to disrupt inequities like these. Social workers are required by our professional ethics to enact social justice and that includes in our own backyards.

### A SOLUTION

During the 2025 Spring semester, WSU School of Social Work faculty and students secured funding from multiple sources to enable all 113 bachelor and master's social work (BSW/MSW) students to be compensated for their practicums. Students were commonly paid an equivalent of \$15/hr through scholarships, stipends, or wages from local employers.

### DATA

To evaluate the paid placements, we:

- Examined BSW and MSW student retention and completion rates in practicum courses
- Surveyed BSW/MSW students (n=64) and practicum supervisors/faculty (n=29) about their perceptions and experiences with the paid practicums

### RESULTS

Students, supervisors, and faculty reported that social work students are committed to doing well in their placements regardless of compensation, but many shared the funding enhanced connections to the work and student's capacity to focus on the work. Further,

- 98% of students completed their practicums (93% with an A- or higher)
- 80% of students reported the funding had an extremely positive impact on their mental health
- 80% of students reported the funding had a positive or extremely positive impact on their connection to the social work profession
- 60% of students reported the funding had an extremely positive impact on their application for licensure

#### Student Quotes

"Compensation for placement can be make or break for many of us."

"... it helped me significantly and allowed me to focus my attention on school. I believe every student should have this option."

"This funding has been a vital lifeline... This support has provided not only financial relief but also a sense of dignity."

"I have been able to fully dedicate my time to school and my learning experience which allows me to prioritize becoming a better social worker."

"I urge Kansas elected officials, WSU administrators, and accrediting bodies to continue advocating for and expanding funding for paid placements—it's an investment in the future of our profession and the well-being of those we serve."

"People who are helped, help other people!!! I was given a paid internship now I am going to continue my work there after graduation helping rural communities."

"Not having paid placements increases the likelihood of students becoming burnt out which is setting them up for failure."

"...I felt valued instead of used."

### TAKE AWAYS

Based on the evidence, we recommend stable funding streams for paid practicums to increase higher education affordability, retain students, and strengthen social work pipelines. While our piecemeal approach was far from perfect, we have demonstrated it is possible for all social work students to have paid practicums.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to to everyone leading and contributing to the P4P movement, to our community partners who mentor social work students for free, to participants in this research, to the Fall 2024 SCWK 851 Applied Social Work Research students who helped create the survey, and to Ndii Kalomo for her support and to Kele Laymon for his contributions to data preparation.