



Transforming the Field
Education Landscape

Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL)

**International Practicum Study
National Report**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) is a partnership project that aims to contribute to the development of sustainable models of social work field education by creating new knowledge through partnered research training and mentoring opportunities for students. The international practicum study was designed by the TFEL team to learn about international field placements, or international practicum, using a mixed-methods online survey. Social work field education coordinators and directors in accredited social work programs in Canada were invited to respond to the survey. The survey was developed to better understand the current content of international practicum including placement models, logistics, resources, and perceptions and experiences regarding international social work field practica. The questionnaire included 12 open-ended questions, eight Likert Scale questions, and 12 qualitative questions. In total, 28 respondents provided their consent to participate in the survey. However, there was considerable variation in the response rate for each question. In addition to the questionnaire, our team sought to identify the number of institutions that offer international practica across Canada. The search was conducted by reviewing social work program websites from CASWE-ACFTS accredited social work programs and through direct communication with field education coordinators and directors.

Most respondents stated that they offered international practica in both their graduate and undergraduate social work programs. In most cases, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools offered international practica with formalized university-to-university and university-field agency agreements. Most respondents identified individual long-term practicum (over three months) as the most common international field placement. The regions of preference for international practicum were Africa and Europe, followed by Australia, Asia, and South America. Survey respondents highlighted challenges with funding and coordinating international practica. Intercultural competence, gaining knowledge about international social work, and global perspectives were emphasized as benefits gained by the student. Most participants stated that their institutions offered pre-departure training and re-entry assistance. Online and individual supervision was available and accessible in most cases. Most respondents agreed that there were not enough resources or staff for international field education. Several respondents indicated their interest in developing partnerships with agencies to facilitate international practica from year to year. Overall, the respondents suggested that funding and partnering with other universities and schools for international practica were the most important areas for improvement. Additionally, the need to organize university exchanges, provide adequate staff and supervision, and facilitate group international field placements were areas of significant interest. Implications and recommendations of the study are provided in this report.

INTRODUCTION

In a globalized context, the field of international social work and social development is important in addressing global challenges. The literature demonstrates that individuals trained and educated in international social work practice are needed worldwide (Das & Anand, 2014; Pawar, 2017). It is not surprising that the number of schools that offer international practicum as a field placement option for students is also increasing. In this study, the objective was to learn and understand international social work field education through the perceptions and experiences of field education coordinators and directors from the CASWE-ACFTS accredited social work education programs across Canada. Due to the increasing popularity of international practica in social work, it is necessary to identify placement models, policies, placement logistics, and the perceptions and experiences of FECDs. The survey was developed, and data were collected and analyzed by the TFEL team. An international practicum subcommittee was formed to serve as an advisory for the project, and a working group provided input at various stages of the project.

It serves to examine the perspectives of field coordinators and capture the current state of international field education, challenges, and benefits of international practice. In order to create quality learning experiences and sustainable practices for students, this understanding is vital. By understanding the models, perceptions, and experiences regarding international social work practica in Canada, it was possible to identify gaps and areas of concern in order to develop more sustainable models of international social work practica in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Practicum in Social Work

In recent years, there has been an increasing demand for the education and training of social work students in international work (Das & Anand, 2014). Prior to the 21st century, there was scant literature about international field placements. However, due to the forces of globalization and geographic mobility, international field placements are becoming more common (Pawar, 2017). This increase is evident as more schools in Canada offer students' opportunities to complete their field placements abroad (Heron, 2019). International field placements or practica are defined as social work field placements that occur abroad in another country, where students experience social work practice in diverse practice contexts, multicultural settings, and learn about the values of international social work (Askeland et al., 2018; Engstrom & Jones, 2007). Currently, the most common models of international practicum include the on-site model, one-time model, the reciprocal or exchange model, and the neighbour-country model (Cleak et al., 2016).

The on-site model involves an on-site faculty member who acts as the field instructor and liaison between the home university and the host agency. In contrast, the one-time model focuses on a student's interest and relies upon informal linkages that are often facilitated by family members or personal contacts (Fox & Hugman, 2019; Pettys et al., 2005). The reciprocal or exchange model involves an affiliated agency in another country and an exchange relationship with the home university. The neighbour-country model consists of neighbouring countries in close geographic proximity and is often chosen by students who are citizens/residents of that country (Fox & Hugman, 2019; Pettys et al., 2005). Thampi (2017) proposed that a two-way exchange model between the host and the home institution can facilitate a meaningful exchange of knowledge, especially when students are trained with professional expertise in the Western practice context. Despite this

proposal, there is no research comparing the efficacy of these models (Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2012).

Benefits and Challenges of International Placement

According to the literature, there are several benefits and challenges associated with international placements. Some of the benefits of international practica include facilitating a better understanding of social justice issues globally, fostering self-awareness, and engaging in transformative social, intellectual, and emotional learning (Fox, 2017; Hay et al., 2018). Challenges associated with international practica include securing adequate supervision for students due to the lack of field supervisors, inadequate financial resources to support international field programs and student grants, concerns with health and safety issues, and challenges with the coordination and oversight of international practicum programs (Mathiesen & Lager, 2007; Nuttman-Shwartz & Berger, 2012; Ravulo, 2016). In a scoping review conducted by Zuchowski et al. (2019), some of the most prevalent challenges identified included cultural, language, and social differences, particularly in placements between the North and the South.

Perspectives on How to Facilitate International Practicum

Hay and colleagues (2018) recommend building and sustaining long-term relationships between post-secondary institutions, international institutions and agencies, in order to develop sustainable placement opportunities. Facilitating international placements and preparing students through pre-departure courses that integrate critical reflection are crucial elements of intercultural competency and preparing students for the reality of international placements (Cleak et al., 2016; Hay et al., 2018). Such orientation and preparation are a shared responsibility between field education coordinators, faculty and staff. Matthew and Lough (2017) as well as Pawar (2017) propose several recommendations to prepare students for international practica:

1. Training for language competency
2. Increase of support, resources, and supervision for students
3. Improve pre-departure training
4. Review standards of practice for international practica
5. Provide re-entry assistance and training
6. Cultivate connections with international agencies and institutions

METHODOLOGY

The TFEL team developed the international practicum survey. A literature review guided the development of the survey questions by drawing from a literature review and an annotated bibliography completed by TFEL. The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board approved this study at the University of Calgary. The survey consisted of a total of 32 questions (12 open-ended questions, eight Likert Scale questions, and 12 closed-ended questions) organized into seven sections:

1. International social work placement overview (7 closed-ended questions and 1 open-ended question).
2. Models of international placement (4 closed-ended questions).
3. Policies and resources (5 open-ended questions).
4. Process of international placement (1 closed-ended and 3 open-ended questions).
5. International field placements and available supports (8 Likert scale questions).

6. Virtual international exchanges (1 open-ended question).
7. A section for respondents to provide input on how to facilitate or improve international practicum (2-open ended questions).

The survey was designed in English, translated into French and reviewed several times by the TFEL team and the international practicum subcommittee. The English and French versions of the survey were launched on Survey Monkey on May 11, 2021, and distributed to CASWE-ACFTS accredited institutions. The recruitment for the survey was advertised on the TFEL website, social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, and sent via email across Canada. The online survey was accessible until June 16th, 2021. In total, there were 28 respondents (23 respondents in English and five respondents in French). The survey responses provided in French were translated using Google Translate and then examined by the TFEL bilingual team for accuracy; the translated responses were then combined with the English responses for analysis.

The survey generated qualitative data using open-ended question responses, which were analyzed separately into two data sheets: one for open-ended question responses and one for responses that fell into the “other” category on the multiple-choice questions. Data analysis for the qualitative data was performed using an inductive approach which involved moving data from specific observations to a general statement while utilizing qualitative content analysis processes of preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The preparation phase began with the selection of a unit of analysis (word or theme), considering sampling factors and details worthy of investigation before choosing the unit of analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The organization phase involved open coding, creating categories, and abstracting generalities (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In reporting the general observations, the open-ended responses were coded, grouped into categories, and listed according to their frequencies. The most frequent codes were then reported and placed under a specific category. In open-ended questions and “other” responses were initially coded by 3 TFEL research team members using words or statements extracted from the data.

To ensure intrasubject reliability, the TFEL research team analyzed the initial codes together and created a single coding sheet for each data set (open-ended and “other” multiple-choice question responses). Once team members created the final coding sheets, a TFEL researcher organized the codes by categorizing similar codes/observations for each data. The codes that appeared the most frequently in the data set for a particular question were grouped as the most common responses for the open-ended question data. Additionally, team members created categories and organized the codes according to where they fell under each category. Once all the codes were organized, the results were abstracted from the code categories.

Observations and interpretations of the data were carried out by comparing what did and did not belong to each coding category within and between each data set (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the survey, which have been organized into the following categories: international social work placement overview, models of international placement, policies and resources, the process of international placement, supports available, virtual international exchanges, and facilitating international practica.

International Social Work Placement Overview:

The first part of the survey included eight questions that provided overall descriptions of international practicum in social work education programs in Canada.

Availability of International Practica

It is important to mention that of the 43 CASWE-ACFTS accredited programs in Canada, 28 (65%) offer international practicum; this information was compiled by reviewing program websites and by personal communication (e.g., emails). However, as the survey was anonymous, it was not identified if the number of participants (28) corresponded individually to those programs.

The survey first asked participants if their social work education programs offered international practica. Respondents indicated that 33.3% of social work programs did offer international practica. In comparison, half of the survey participants (50%) reported that they did not offer international practica at present due to travel advisories associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impacts

Regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on international practicum opportunities, 31.25% of participants reported that their international field placements were deferred. There were few participants who expressed that international practica were not affected (18.75%). On the contrary, a few participants indicated that international practica changed completely (12.5%).

The survey questions examined the reasons academic institutions engaged in international practicum. These reasons fell into two categories: international practica help students gain important social work knowledge and practice skills, and an international practicum is beneficial for the academic institution. Some of the reasons for engaging in international practica are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons for Engaging in International Practicum

Reasons for Engaging in International Practicum
Opportunity to gain international social work practice experience
Broadening partnerships
Field learning experience
Student interest in international field work
To mitigate the high number of students and competition in Canada (for local placements)
Gain global perspectives
Learning through institutional partnerships
Experience diverse practice contexts
Would like to engage in international practica
Enhancing student experiences
Support international students to complete practicum in home countries
Previous relationship due to past international practica

According to the survey respondents, student interest in international practica is clearly evident and allows students to gain international social work practice experience and a global perspective. International field placements provide learning experiences in diverse practice contexts, and can encourage learning through institutional partnerships, that enhance the student experience. For the academic institution, international practica can broaden partnerships and

mitigate competition for field placements due to the high number of students in local placement settings.

Stand Alone Practicum

The survey examined if international practica were offered as a stand-alone or as part of an international certificate/program/diploma. Most of the respondents (64.7%) indicated that international practica were offered as a stand-alone placement (and not provided as a part of an international certificate, program, or diploma).

Type of Program Offering International Practica

The survey asked participants to respond to the following statement, “From which program do students undertake international practica?” The data showed that both graduate and undergraduate social work programs offered international placements (see Table 2).

Table 2. Type of Program Offering International Practica

Academic Program	Responses	Percentage
Answered 17 Skipped 11	(n=17)	
Undergraduate	5	29.4%
Graduate	6	35.3%
Both	6	35.3%

Regions of Preference for International Practica

Respondents were invited to select all answers that applied to their programs regarding the areas where students typically completed international field placements. Africa and Europe (50%) were selected as the main regions for international practics, followed by Australia, Asia, and South America. Other regions, such as North America, Central America, and Caribbean Regions, were also included. Minimal opportunities were identified in New Zealand, Israel, and the Middle East, with less than 15% of respondents selecting each of these regions (see Table 3). One of the French speaker respondents highlighted that even though their institution has inter-university agreements with undergraduate programs in Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe, these agreements were currently undergoing evaluation due to student retention issues.

Table 3. Regions Where Students Complete International Practica

Answer Choices	Responses	Percentage
Answered 16 Skipped 12	(n=16)	
Asia	5	31.25%
Africa	8	50%
North America	3	18.75%
South America	5	31.25%
Europe	8	50%
Australia	7	43.75%
Central America & Caribbean Region	3	18.75%
New Zealand	2	12.5%
Israel	1	6.25%

Middle East	1	6.25%
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The survey also examined the approximate number of students per institution that completed an international field placement in a given year (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic). More than half of the survey respondents (58.8%) indicated having between 1 to 6 students in international placements on an annual basis.

Models of International Placement

The second part of the survey examined the characteristics of the models for international placements.

Models

Over half of the survey respondents (57.1%) indicated that their institution had formalized university-to-university agreements and/or university-field agency agreements. However, 42.8% of respondents identified that international placements were offered as an individual, independent, and/or informal linkage. Only a small percentage of Canadian institutions included the Neighbour Country Model (14.3%).

Type of International Practica Opportunities

Regarding the types of international practica opportunities offered, most respondents (85.7%) identified individual placements as the most common type of international field placements, while group placements were limited to 14.3% of the opportunities. Furthermore, 20% of respondents identified virtual practice as an available type of international practica. Although the percentage is low, virtual practice in field education appears to be a new trend in social work schools in Canada. Additionally, it is important to note that none of the participants selected the options of: “Placement with a third-party intermediary (e.g., World University Service of Canada (WUSC))”, or “Interactive video exchange between different countries.”

Duration of International Practica

Respondents were asked about the typical course duration of international practica offered by institutions. The results show that most of the international practica (78.6%) were of a long-term duration, defined as three months or longer. Participants did not identify practica that were short-term.

Number of Agencies Involved

When participants were asked if students were typically placed in international practica with one agency or multiple agencies, most of the responses (85.7%) indicated that international practica were offered only by one agency.

Policies and Resources

Policies

The survey examined whether the academic institution had policies or guidelines for international practica. Out of the twenty-eight survey respondents (58.3%), there were twelve responses (42.8%) that answered this section. Nine respondents (75.0%) answered affirmatively and indicated yes to having policies for international practica, while three respondents (25.0%) did not do so. Given that most of the respondents had policies or guidelines for international practica, it can be assumed that these academic institutions organize formal international practicum programs.

Working with International/Study Abroad Offices

Respondents in the survey were asked whether their social work program collaborated with the international/study abroad office to find placements or facilitate practicum requirements (training, agreements, etc.). Of the twenty-eight survey respondents (58.3%), fourteen responded to this question (42.8%). Seven (50.0%) of the respondents indicated that they worked with the international/study abroad office, and seven (50.0%) did not.

Funding for International Practicum Students

Survey respondents were asked whether there was funding available for international practicum students. Of the twenty-eight survey respondents, fourteen responded to this question (42.8%). Of those, two (14.2%) respondents confirmed funding for international practicum students, four (28.6%) indicated there was no funding available, and eight (57.1%) replied that there was typically no funding available or that funding was provided through other resources (such as the university, international studies office, or grants). Given that only 14.2% of the respondents stated there was funding available for international practica, there is a lack of secure funding available for students to pursue an international practicum. Additionally, this implication is further supported by the 57.1% of respondents stating that funding was not typically available, or only available through sources outside of the faculty. These findings suggest that future research should explore solutions or models that could secure funding for students to pursue an international practicum, as a lack of available funding could be a potential deterrent for students. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore the current state of funding for the administrative components of an international practicum.

Benefits of International Practica for Students

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify some benefits associated with engaging in international practica in their program. This was an open-ended question that aimed to identify the perceived benefits of international practica for students or the faculty that field education coordinators and directors have seen over the years. In total, there were 15 responses gathered. Overall, the most significant benefits for students in international practica were intercultural competency, intercultural experience, gaining knowledge about international social work, gaining global perspectives, and student interest in international field work. The perceived faculty benefits focused on mitigating the high number of students and competition for local placements in Canada. The perceived benefits of international practica are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Benefits of International Practicum

Benefits of International Practicum
Intercultural experience
Intercultural competency
Gain knowledge about international social work
Gain global perspectives
Student interest in international field work
Gain linguistic skills
Gain knowledge & experience with Indigenous communities
Choice-based model
Understanding structural forces
Critical reflection
Understanding the effects of colonization & Western perspectives
Opportunity to gain international social work practice experience

Mitigating competition for placements due to the high numbers of students in Canada

Encourage diversity & intercultural richness
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The main benefits are presented and discussed in the next section.

Students' Interest in International Field Work

According to the survey responses, an international practicum is an excellent option for students interested in international social work practice (Respondent 5, Q16). Some of the respondents also stated that they have a “choice-based model and if they are interested, they try to fulfill that request” (Respondent 7, Q16). This placement model benefits social work students, as most academic institutions try to facilitate opportunities to enrich a student’s interests and experiences.

Gaining Knowledge about International Social Work

Many respondents noted that they have seen students have a “broader understanding of global issues and experiences” (Respondent 4, Q16). Students also learned about the values and the importance of international social work in local contexts. Respondents in the survey also stated that through international practica, students gained perspectives different from their own. For example, a respondent said that students gained professional social work perspectives by learning “about social work practice in a different culture” (Respondent 1, Q16). Students also “learn to negotiate experiences of being other,” as they learn to examine and evaluate “the broader structural forces (e.g., colonization) as they impact individuals and communities around the world” (Respondent 4, Q16).

Intercultural Competency and Experience

Respondents shared that international practica exposed social work students to diverse cultures, helping them to better understand global issues. As a result, students were able to apply various concepts learned in the classroom such as cultural humility, safety, and responsiveness, to different contexts (Respondent 3, Q16; Respondent 4, Q16). An international practicum provides students with the opportunity to enhance their intercultural competency through direct learning experiences. According to a respondent (Respondent 10, Q16), through international practica, students gain professional experience and build a network abroad while also enhancing their intercultural competence. Through these experiences, they enhance their social work practice knowledge and skills that may, in turn, be transferrable to a variety of domestic and international practice settings. Another respondent noted that international practica could help students “gain experience with Indigenous communities or communities that experience colonization” (Respondent 6, Q16).

Mitigating Competition for Field Placements

According to the survey responses, one of the benefits of international practica for the social work faculty is that it relieves some of the burdens faced by field education coordinators and directors when searching for field placements in a local setting. International practica offer students who may be interested in international social work another option for their field placement, which ultimately “also helps a little bit with competition for placements in Canada” (Respondent 7, Q16).

The Challenges in Coordinating International Practica

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify some of the challenges associated with coordinating international practica for students. This was an open-ended question where

respondents could share their experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of the challenges experienced in coordinating international practica as field education coordinators and directors. The most significant challenges noted were 1) partnerships and agreements and 2) logistics of coordinating international practica. The responses to this question are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Challenges of International Practica

Challenges of International Practica
Affiliation agreements are difficult to secure
Building long-term partnerships for international practicum
Establishing student interest in international field work
Distinguishing between the student’s intention and desire to travel versus desire in an international practicum
Time constraints
Program barriers
Time zone issues
Technology
Supervision
Lack of resources
Processing & confirming practicum placements are a lot of work
Meeting standards of accreditation
Language barriers
Health & safety of students while abroad
Less value placed on international practicum
Retention issues

The major challenges are presented and discussed in the next section.

Partnerships and Agreements

Many respondents stated that it was difficult to build long-term partnerships for international practicum, as placements are often “student-driven” (Respondent 1, Q17). Even though there was student interest in international practica, it was challenging to maintain a consistent relationship with partners. Respondents found it difficult to “sustain relationships with practicum partners globally” due to “lack of time, support, and resources to recruit international placement opportunities” (Respondent 11, Q17). In addition to partnerships with field agencies and organizations, respondents found it challenging to “maintain collaborative links with partner schools” (Respondent 12, Q17) and experienced difficulties with negotiating and securing affiliation agreements (Respondent 1, Q17; Respondent 7, Q17).

Logistics of Coordinating International Practica

The survey respondents stated that “recruitment of interested students” was challenging as international practica were not typical placements. While there was interest in an international social work placement, there was little retention of students for placements (Respondent 13, Q17) due to the costs, expectations, and demands of an international placement. Respondents shared that it was challenging to distinguish between a student’s intention and desire to travel and a student’s interest in an international practicum. There was a common view that international practica were an avenue for students to travel internationally (Respondent 3, Q17). As a result, field education coordinators

and directors have a responsibility to ensure that students are not doing this because they want to travel. It is also noted that because international practica were not typical placements and required significant coordination, there were logistical challenges such as time constraints, lack of resources, technology issues, time zone issues, program barriers, and the lack of supervision for students. Statements that relate to these challenges include:

- “Requires a lot of effort to process and confirm” (Respondent 8, Q17)
- “Students require a fair bit of support before departure and upon their return” (Respondent 8, Q17).
- “Challenges of lack of time, support, and resources to ... support students in all the ways they may need while they are abroad and upon re-entry” (Respondent 11, Q17)
- “Time-intense” (Respondent 2, Q17)
- “Our students are in concurrent courses and practicum integration seminars so there are time zone and technology issues” (Respondent 4, Q17)
- “Student access to technology, internet, and sometimes even to electricity to participate in online supervision” (Respondent 11, Q17)
- “Rigid school program, which limits possibilities for students” (Respondent 13, Q17)
- “Finding external supervision for students while they are abroad” (Respondent 8; Q17)

Some respondents identified communication concerns “across time zones with partners who have limited access to technology and/or who do not speak English as translation services to support international practicum are not readily available” (Respondent 11, Q17).

Process of International Placements

Processes and Prerequisites for International Practica

The survey inquired about course requirements and prerequisites as part of the application process for students to be considered for an international placement. Out of the 13 responses for this question, four (30.8%) respondents indicated that there were no prerequisites for an international practicum. According to the respondents, the requirements for an international practicum include:

1. Submission of an essay/commentary/proposal required
2. Good academic standing
3. Interview process
4. Completion of pre-departure training and courses

The most frequent responses to this question are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Processes & Prerequisites Required for International Practica

Process & Prerequisites Required for International Practica
Essay/commentary/proposal required
Good academic standing
Interview required
Pre-departure training and courses
Review by field education committee
Approval by field education coordinator
Application through international office

Student required to find placement
Completion of all core courses
Inquiries go through field education coordinator
Language efficiency

Pre-departure Training

The survey examined whether academic institutions offer pre-departure training for international practica. There were 13 responses for this question, and approximately nine respondents (69.2%) offered pre-departure training, while four respondents (44.4%) did not. Further research is needed to determine the types of courses and training offered for international practicum students.

Re-entry Assistance

The survey also examined whether academic institutions provide re-entry support and what is included after students complete an international practicum. Approximately 9 respondents (69.2%) indicated providing re-entry support for students, with the specification that students are asked to participate in a re-entry debrief with their supervisors and provide a re-entry presentation. Four respondents (44.4%) stated that they were not offered re-entry assistance for international practicums.

Curriculum for International Practica

The survey examined how the curriculum prepared students for international practica. According to the results, most students were prepared for international social work practica through elective courses. Nevertheless, 10% of the respondents stated that the curriculum did not prepare students for international practica nor were there any mandatory courses for international practica, especially within MSW programs.

Access to Supervision

Survey respondents were asked "How do students access supervision during international practice in your program?" and were invited to select all the options that applied. Most respondents highlighted that supervision was offered online (71.4%) and individually (64.3%). The respondents also identified that supervision (50%) was also accessible in person. A smaller number of respondents (21.4%) indicated that group supervision was an option in their institutions, and fewer (7.1%) respondents offered peer supervision. Some respondents offered concurrent field seminars for students online based on the capacity of the field agency. Supervision was offered through the partner university in the case of international agreements, and external supervision was provided remotely by a social work professional recognized by the home university institution.

International Field Placements & Available Supports

Survey participants answered a series of eight statements about the overall resources available for international practica and were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a Likert-style ("strongly disagree," "disagree," "somewhat disagree", "somewhat agree," "agree", "strongly agree," and "not applicable"). The responses to all eight statements are shown in Table 7 by the combined "Somewhat Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree," the combined "strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree," and "not applicable." For detailed responses, please refer to Appendix B. The responses were further analyzed and grouped into five themes: international field education resources, including financial resources and staffing; access to technology; quality field instruction; challenges in international practica; and partnerships with field agencies.

Table 7. International Field Placement and Available Supports

Statement	■ Somewhat Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree ■ Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree ■ N/A		
Answered 13 Skipped 15			
1. International field education receives, overall, adequate resources, including financial resources, for its programs and operations in my program; financial resources are available to students/encourage students to partake in international placements (e.g., resources such as bursaries, awards, etc.)	8 (61.5%)	3 (23.1%)	2(15.4%)
2. International field education staffing levels in my program are adequate to fully address the responsibilities of overseeing international field placements.	7(53.8%)	4(30.8%)	2(15.4%)
3. International field education in my program has an adequate access to technology and technical support.	4(30,8%)	7(53,8%)	2(15,4%)
4. Most agencies, that accept international practica students, are committed to providing quality field instruction on an ongoing basis for international practica students.	1(7,7%)	9(69,2%)	3 (23,1%)
5. It is challenging to find international practica opportunities for students in my program.	5(38,5%)	6(46,1%)	2 (15,4%)
6. Safety issues are addressed adequately in international practica in my program.	4(30,8%)	6(46,2%)	3(23,1%)
7. My program has existing partnerships with agencies in different countries to facilitate international practica from year to year.	5(38,5%)	5(38,5%)	3(23,1%)
8. My program would like to develop partnerships with agencies to facilitate international practica from year to year.	3(23,1%)	10 (77%%)	

International Field Education Resources

Respondents were asked to reflect on whether international field education received adequate resources such as financial resources for programs, operations, and to encourage students' participation in international placements (e.g., bursaries, awards, etc.). Many respondents (61.5%) expressed that there were not enough resources for international field education. Most respondents strongly disagreed (23.1%), somewhat disagreed (23.1%), and disagreed (15.3%) that international field education receives adequate resources for programs, as well as financial resources to encourage students to participate in international placements (see Table 6). Similar responses were observed regarding staffing levels. Over half of the respondents (53.8%) considered that international field education staffing levels in their programs were not adequate to address the responsibilities of overseeing international field placements fully. Some respondents strongly agreed about the staffing levels (30.8%), somewhat agreed (23.1%) or agreed (7.6%) that they have adequate staffing for international field education.

Access to Technology

Respondents (53.8%) agreed that international field education has adequate access to technology and technical support in their programs. However, 30.8% disagreed with this statement.

Quality of Field Instruction

Most participants (69.2%) agreed that most agencies that accept international practica students were committed to provide quality field instruction on an ongoing basis.

Challenges in International Practica

Regarding the challenges in finding international practica opportunities for students, the responses were divided. Specifically, 46.2% of respondents agreed that it is challenging to locate international practica opportunities, while 30.8% of respondents did not agree that finding opportunities represent a concern in their programs. Similarly, 46.2% of the respondents agreed that safety issues were addressed adequately in international practica in their program, while 30.8% disagreed.

Partnerships with Field Agencies

There was an equal divide between agreeing and disagreeing scale (see Table 7) with regards to the statement on existing partnerships with agencies in different countries. The final statement was regarding the establishment of partnerships with agencies to facilitate international practica from year to year for which most of the participants (77%) strongly agreed.

Virtual International Exchanges

The survey asked respondents whether they offered the option of a virtual international practicum. In total, there were 13 responses to the question regarding virtual international exchanges. Ten respondents (76.9%) said they did not offer virtual international exchanges, while a small number of three respondents (23.1%) said they did offer virtual international exchanges. It should also be noted that a virtual practicum was only offered because of travel restrictions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Perspectives on How to Facilitate International Practicum

Several open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide feedback on coordinating international practica. The first open-ended question asked if respondents had anything else they

would like to share about international practica opportunities. The survey respondents identified some areas of concern for international practica:

- Greater support is required for international practicum students
- There is a lack of resources available for international practica
- Time constraints
- Lack of funding for international practicum

A few respondents stated that these international practica opportunities are not that common “as it takes a lot of resources including financial for students and there are not substantial funding programs offered” (Respondent 5, Q32) and that they “do not have the resources to provide the necessary support but would entertain ‘one off’ requests by highly motivated students” (Respondent 3, Q32). One respondent stated that because international practicums are costly, “students are likely to participate in international placements if there is adequate funding” (Respondent 6, Q32).

The survey asked respondents to provide their opinions on how international practica could be better facilitated. The most common responses received include:

- Partnering with other universities
- Access to schools that have international practicums
- University exchanges
- Adequate staff and supervisors
- Funding for international practicums
- Group international practicums

A respondent stated that “partnering with universities ensures academic rigour and safety/support resources to foster a good student learning experience” (Respondent 1, Q33). Additionally, study abroad or international offices could expand their scope by recruiting and facilitating international practica and could also help to decrease the burden on field coordinators/directors (Respondent 9, Q33). Having partnerships or relationships with universities with international practica can help field coordinators/directors “develop a process” at their school (Respondent 4, Q33). Other respondents also noted that having partnerships and connections with other universities can open doors for exchanges, providing “dedicated resources and staff to manage it” (Respondent 5, Q33). Faculty members can also help with the recruitment process by taking an active role in facilitating opportunities for international practicum through their international networks to help with the shortage of staff (Respondent 9, Q33). A respondent also mentioned the possibility of contracting a third-party organization, like CASWE, to facilitate international practica for universities across Canada and share the same international practicum resources (Respondent 9, Q33). Having a third-party contractor like CASWE hire a full-time staff member, with social work programs to cover the costs for staff and resources through CASWE fees (Respondent 9, Q33). Other respondents mentioned that “dedicated staff and resources to facilitate placements ... funding for students,” such as scholarships can be helpful for students (Respondent 6, Q33; Respondent 10, Q33). Finally, a group international practicum option was suggested to possibly increase the number of participating students (Respondent 7, Q33).

DISCUSSION

The survey responses demonstrate support for international practica because it allows students to gain essential skills in international social work, experience diverse practice contexts, and gain global

perspectives different from their own. The value of international social work, the importance of social work practice in diverse practice contexts and multicultural settings, and learning about the values of international social work is evident (Askeland et al., 2018; Engstrom & Jones, 2007). From an institutional point of view, engaging in international practicum assists field education coordinators and directors in placing a high number of students while addressing competition for local placements. Additionally, academic institutions expressed an interest in building and broadening international partnerships.

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced international practicum field placements due to travel restrictions around the globe. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect social work practice in many diverse ways, this could potentially affect the availability of international practicums in the future.

Approximately 57.1% of respondents stated that their institutions developed formal agreements with field agencies. The individual placement model was the most widely used model for international practicum. However, at this point, it is unknown what field model works best in specific contexts, as there are very few studies that evaluate the different field education models in international practica. Future research is needed to evaluate the efficacy of field models in diverse international contexts.

Many field education coordinators and directors stated that their institutions have policies and/or guidelines for international practica. However, little is known about these policies and guidelines. Due to a lack of standardization of international field placements, every institution has its own set of policies, guidelines, and processes for international practicum. Future research should further examine the policies and guidelines associated with international practica.

The benefits of international practica for students include gaining intercultural competency and experience, broadening their knowledge about international social work and global perspectives; and providing opportunities to complete a practicum in their areas of interest. The benefits obtained through an international practicum can be translated into the local practice context, as skills such as intercultural competency are required in many social work practice settings. Not only are there benefits for students, but international practica also benefit the faculty, as it encourages diversity and cultural richness and mitigates the burden experienced by field education coordinators and directors in securing local placements.

The study identified several challenges which included the logistics of coordinating international practica. There were concerns about time constraints for field education coordinators and directors as their workload was already significant with coordinating local field placements. Even though institutions did not receive many requests or applications from students for international placements, the respondents indicated that the process of finding international placements required more time and work than a local placement. For example, field education coordinators must consider time zone differences, technology issues, and finding a supervisor for the student in another country. There were also concerns about the communication established with host field agencies and institutions that lack access to technology (or lack a stable internet connection) or do not have access to translation services. In addition to these concerns, some students may not be aware of international practicum options since international social work is considered an elective course in many schools. Field education coordinators and directors also expressed the challenge of determining whether students are primarily interested in international placements to travel or because they want to have a

field experience abroad. On top of these short-term logistical challenges, there are also long-term challenges with developing affiliation agreements and building long-term relationships and partnerships for international placements.

From the survey, it is evident that some institutions offer pre-departure training. However, the content of the training provided prior to the student's international placement is unknown. Students require training and preparation prior to undertaking an international practicum, as a lack of preparation may negatively affect their placement experience. Additionally, according to the survey responses, some schools do not offer re-entry assistance or only provide debrief with a supervisor.

According to the survey responses, international field education lacks adequate resources and/or staff to fulfill the responsibilities required for international placements. Relatedly, funding is a concern for students because of the costs associated with international practica. This is presented as a barrier for students to access international placement opportunities.

It would also be beneficial for future research to examine international field education policies and guidelines and identify consistent patterns or areas for improvement. Content and policy analysis could serve as an important step in the creation of a standardized model for international social work practica in academic institutions across Canada.

LIMITATIONS

There are a few notable limitations to this international practicum study. Since this survey was conducted in Canada, the findings are relevant to the Canadian context and capture only the perspectives and experiences within CASWE-ACFTS accredited institutions. Restricting the survey population to a Canadian context could create generalizations about international practica that may not accurately reflect other international contexts, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the international practicum survey was anonymous for respondents, it was not possible to determine which institutions responded to the survey and how many responses originated from each particular institution.

There are 43 CASWE-ACFTS accredited institutions. Our research indicates that 28 CASWE-ACFTS accredited schools offer international practica. Our survey had a response rate of 65.1% (28 responses). However, only nine responses out of the 28 indicated that their institution offered international practica. We also cannot assume that all of these nine responses originated from different institutions, as it is possible that multiple responses came from the same institution. As a result, we only received responses from 32.1% of schools that offer international practica. In addition, considering our aim was to examine the experiences, perspectives, and challenges experienced by field education coordinators and directors, preferably from institutions/programs that offer international practicum, the sample size was considerably small. As a result, the small number of respondents for this survey increases the potential for bias, which ultimately impacts the reliability and validity of the survey results.

The sample population for the survey was limited to field education coordinators and directors and did not include other faculty members or students. Future research is recommended to understand

the perspectives, experiences and challenges of students and field educators involved in international practica.

Lastly, this survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have affected results. Travel restrictions prohibited academic institutions from offering international practica and discouraged students from pursuing international placements during this unprecedented time.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Through the international practicum survey, social work field education coordinators and directors in Canada shared opinions and perceptions regarding international field placements. The respondents reported feedback that we believe would help identify gaps and areas of concern that would contribute to developing more sustainable models for international social work practica in the future. Based on the responses of this survey, we suggest the following recommendations and future directions that can help facilitate and improve international practicum opportunities:

1. There is a lack of resources and support for Canada's international social work field education coordinators and directors. The reality of finding and processing international placements requires more time and work than a local placement. Therefore, more significant support of social work programs, schools, and national authorities, such as CASWE, is needed by providing adequate resources, funding, and staff. Likewise, evaluating the current field placement models for sustainability would be beneficial for the future of international practica in order to provide greater benefits to each stakeholder (field agencies, field instructors, supervisors, students, and others).
2. International placements are a costly endeavour for students, and the lack of funding resources and support are considered significant obstacles. Creating field education models with secure and sustained funding and more logistical resources to support students will enhance the opportunities for students to pursue and participate in international practica. Grants and awards are needed to support international practicum students.
3. Although it was reflected in the data that students undertook preparations prior to international practica, the content and scope of this preparatory work and training were unclear. We believe there are two aspects to consider for improvements in this pre-departure stage. First, the logistics component. International/Study Abroad Offices may offer critical support for field education coordinators and directors. Second, providing pre-departure training from a social work perspective. It is important to provide students with specific tools based on anti-oppressive and anti-colonial perspectives for a successful social work placement immersion in another country.
4. After undertaking an international practicum, some schools do not offer students re-entry assistance or provide minimal assistance through a debrief with the supervisor or personnel of the institution that sent them abroad. A more systematic accompaniment with reflection sessions is critical. Reflecting on experiences with guidance on how to react to future challenges based on their new knowledge would benefit students and the profession.
5. The study found that online and individual supervision was offered in most placements. About half of the respondents indicated that in-person supervision was also offered. There is a need to review the individual and in-person supervision model and evaluate

different models of supervision including group models to enrich students' experience. Group models of supervision can also contribute to building community and, at the same time, alleviate some of the challenges associated with finding qualified field instructor supervisors.

6. The importance of long-term relationships with international stakeholders is essential in facilitating international practica year after year. Many participants expressed an interest in building long-term relationships with agencies in different countries. This opportunity could contribute to creating greater sustainability in international practica and would facilitate the work of field education coordinators and directors in Canada while benefitting students' learning and experience abroad.
7. The importance of long-term relationships with international stakeholders is essential in facilitating international practica year after year. Many participants expressed an interest in building long-term relationships with agencies in different countries. This opportunity could contribute to creating greater sustainability in international practica and would facilitate the work of field education coordinators and directors in Canada while benefitting students' learning and experience abroad. The study found a lack of collaboration in international practica between universities in Canada. The partnership between schools and the long-term collaboration within international stakeholders is an avenue to develop more robust models and practices for international practica. It was recommended by a survey respondent that the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) take leadership in supporting and evaluating international practica. CASWE has the potential to facilitate international field placements for students and member institutions, to share resources and to create more sustainable models of international practica.

Future research is required to move forward with these recommendations. The development of sustainable models for international practicum need to include increasing financial and logistical supports for international practica, facilitating group practicum and group supervision, and creating virtual practicum opportunities. Future research should identify the experiences and perspectives of Canadian students based on their international practicum experiences. The evaluation of student exchange models with overseas schools, including those located in the Global South, is needed. Finally, there is a need for CASWE leadership to create partnerships between universities that offer international practica in Canada and international stakeholders. This may contribute to developing sustainable models for international practica in the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The study provides an overview of international practica, including perceptions regarding the models and processes of international placement, policies, resources, available supports, virtual international exchanges, and some critical reflections on improving international practica.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited the availability of international practica in 2020-2021, but also provided an opportunity to reflect on the delivery and coordination of international field education. The survey results demonstrated the need for improvements in models and methods that are currently being used. We believe that the challenges identified in the study provide an opportunity to contemplate the development of more sustainable models in the future.

Field education coordinators and directors are primarily responsible for coordinating international practica. However, they face challenges such as time constraints, maintaining long-term partnerships or affiliation agreements and promoting international practica to encourage student interests. The study findings show that there is a need to develop partnerships between Canadian social work academic institutions and global stakeholders in order to facilitate new sustainable international practicum opportunities.

International field education has been, and will remain, a viable opportunity for the emerging practitioners to develop social work skills in diverse contexts. International social workers serve an essential role in addressing global problems in Canada and internationally. An international practicum provides students a transformative learning opportunity (Drolet, 2012). Therefore, we recommend examining new international field education models, increasing resources, and greater collaboration among social work schools in Canada to create enriching international practicum experiences for social work students. Sustainable and meaningful international placements can help emerging practitioners integrate global perspectives in social work practice, and as a result, provide responsive solutions that reflect the needs of increasingly diverse local communities.

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APPENDIX A – SURVEY QUESTIONS

TFEL International Practicum Survey

INFORMED CONSENT FOR THE “INTERNATIONAL PRACTICUM SURVEY”

The purpose of this study is to learn about the knowledge & understanding of

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and confidential and will not affect your relationship with the TFEL partnership. There are minimal anticipated risks to participating in this survey. By choosing to continue in this survey, you provide consent to participate and note your understanding of these protections. If you wish to decline participation in the survey, you may simply exit the survey. This survey may take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participants may prefer to begin the survey, stop, and return to the survey later.

General demographic data are requested. Information collected through this survey will be kept confidential, except for aggregated data sets that allow analysis and communication of results. Responses will be aggregated into data sets, such as geographic region and school size; individual responses will not be identifiable or available to parties other than the TFEL researchers. This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. This survey meets standards for human subject protections.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities: This electronic survey is compatible with most screen reading technology. Google's ChromeVox is one option, however, other screen reading programs can be used. The online survey is administered by SurveyMonkey®, an American software company. As such, your responses are subject to U.S. laws, including the USA Patriot Act. The risks associated with participation are minimal, and similar to those associated with many e-mail programs, such as Gmail®, and social media spaces, such as Facebook®.

If you have any questions, please email tfelresearch@gmail.com or contact Dr. Julie Drolet at jdrolet@ucalgary.ca.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

Dr. Julie Drolet

Project Director, Transforming the Field Education Landscape (TFEL) & Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

I consent to participate in the survey:

- Yes (proceed to survey questions)
- No

International Field Placement Survey

International Social Work Placement Overview

Do you offer international practica in your social work education program?

- Yes (proceed to survey questions)
- No
- Not right now (Currently not offering them due to reasons like travel advisories and COVID or other reasons)

What are your institution's reasons/rationale for engaging in international practica (open question)

Is the international practicum offered as a stand-alone or as part of an international certificate/program/diploma?

- Stand-alone
- International certificate/program/diploma
- Other

From which program do students undertake international practica?

- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Both- our program allows both undergrad and grads to do international placements

Typically, what are the regions in which students normally complete international field placements? (select all that apply)

- Asia
- Africa
- North America
- South America
- Europe
- Australia
- Other _____

In your institution, what is the approximate number of students completing an international field placement in a year (before the COVID-19 pandemic)?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7 or more

How has COVID-19 affected international practica opportunities? (select all that apply)

- International practica were not affected
- International practica ended early
- International practica changed completely
- International practica were deferred
- International practica moved online

- Other (please specify) _____

Models of International Placement

Which model(s) are used for international practica in your institution? (select all that apply)

- Individual placement (independent/informal linkage where international practicum is sought out by student with little input from home university, and student then participates in a placement)
- Neighbor-country (students are placed in a close proximity country, often where they have resided in the past, such as students going to the United States from Canada)
- Formalized university-to-university agreements
- On-site group (faculty facilitate international practica experience with a group of students for a shorter placement of approximately 2-3 weeks)
- Formalized university to field agency agreements (formalized agreement between universities and international agency/organization)

What types of international practica opportunities does your program offer?

- On-site group (faculty facilitate international practica experience with a group of students for a shorter placement of approximately 2-3 weeks)
- Individual placement
- Group placement
- Placement with a third-party intermediary (e.g., World University Service of Canada (WUSC))
- Virtual placement
- Interactive video exchange between different countries
- Other _____

What is the typical duration of your international practica?

- Long-term (More than 3 months)
- Short-term (Less than three weeks)
- Short-term (More than three weeks, less than 3 months)
- Other (explain)

Are students typically placed in an international practica with:

- One agency
- Two or more agencies
- Other (explain)

Policies and Resources

Does your institution have a policy or guideline for international practica? If you are willing to share the policy, please include your email address:

Does your institution work with the International/Study Abroad office to find placements for students and/or to help facilitate placement requirements (training, agreements, etc.)?

Do you have funding available for international practica students?

What are the benefits for students in your program to undertake international practica?

What are the challenges in coordinating international practica for students in your program?

Process of International Placement

What is the process for student's to apply for an international placement? Are there any pre-requisites?

Do you provide students with pre-departure training for international practica?

Do you provide students with re-entry (coming back home from an international practicum) assistance after the international practica is completed? What is included in the re-entry support?

How are students prepared in the curriculum for international practica in your program?

How do students access supervision during international practica in your program? (select all that apply)

- Online
- In-person
- Individually
- Group
- Peer supervision
- Not applicable
- Other (please specify)

International Field Placements & Available Supports (Likert Scale)

Please indicate your level of agreement:

Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Applicable

International field education receives adequate resources overall, including financial resources, for its programs and operations in my program; financial resources are available to students encourage students to partake in international placements (e.g. resources such as bursaries, awards, etc.)

International field education staffing levels in my program are adequate to fully address the responsibilities of overseeing international field placements.

International field education in my program has adequate access to technology and technical support.

Most agencies, that accept international practica students are committed to providing quality field instruction on an ongoing basis for international practica students.

It is challenging to find international practica opportunities for students in my program.

Safety issues are addressed adequately in international practica in my program.

My program has existing partnerships with agencies in different countries to facilitate international practica from year to year.

My program would like to develop partnerships with agencies to facilitate international practica from year to year.

Virtual International Exchanges

Do you offer virtual international practica opportunities? (please comment)

Is there anything else that you would like to share about international practica opportunities? (Open Question)

In your opinion, how can international practicums be better facilitated?

If you wish to receive a confirmation copy of this submitted survey or send a copy to someone else, please enter an e-mail address below.

WARNING: You can only enter one e-mail address; otherwise, this option will not work.

* If you have completed this survey, please respond to this item and then click the "Submit" button below. You will not be able to access this survey instrument after you submit your survey.

Thank you for your participation, survey completed.

APPENDIX B – RESPONSES OF LIKERT-SCALE QUESTIONS

Q23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following questions:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. International field education receives adequate resources overall, including financial resources, for its programs and operations in my program; financial resources are available to students encourage students to partake in international placements (e.g. resources such as bursaries, awards, etc.)	3 (23,1%)	2 (15,3%)	3 (23,1%)	1 (7,6%)	2 (15,3%)	0 (0%)	2 (15,3%)
2. International field education staffing levels in my program are adequate to fully address the responsibilities of overseeing international field placements.	1 (7,6%)	6 (46,1%)	0 (0%)	3 (23,1%)	1 (7,6%)	0 (0%)	2 (15,3%)
3. International field education in my program has adequate access to technology and technical support.	0 (0%)	1 (7,6%)	3 (23,1%)	3 (23,1%)	3 (23,1%)	1 (7,6%)	2 (15,3%)

4. Most agencies, that accept international practica students are committed to providing quality field instruction on an ongoing basis for international practica students.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7,6%)	3 (23,1%)	2 (15,3%)	4 (30,7%)	3 (23,1%)
5. It is challenging to find international practica opportunities for students in my program.	1 (7,6%)	2 (15,3%)	2 (15,3%)	2 (15,3%)	1 (7,6%)	3 (23,1%)	2 (15,3%)
6. Safety issues are addressed adequately in international practica in my program.	1 (7,6%)	1 (7,6%)	2 (15,3%)	2 (15,3%)	0 (0%)	4 (30,7%)	3 (23,1%)
7. My program has existing partnerships with agencies in different countries to facilitate international practica from year to year.	1 (7,6%)	1 (7,6%)	3 (23,1%)	2 (15,3%)	0 (0%)	3 (23,1%)	3 (23,1%)
8. My program would like to develop partnerships with agencies to facilitate international practica from year to year.	1 (7,6%)	1 (7,6%)	1 (7,6%)	2 (15,3%)	1 (7,6%)	7 (53,8%)	0 (0%)

