STUDENT PLACEMENT INTERVIEW GUIDANCE & QUESTIONS

Discipline of Social Work

Rigorous preparation for your placement interview can help you to not only feel more ready and confident for your upcoming interview, but also provide you with the opportunity to introspect on your journey and motivations towards becoming a Social Worker.

AASW has provided the following resource to students of Social Work:

A Practical Guide for Students and Graduating Social Workers

Some Examples of Typical Agency Questions

1. Why have you applied for a placement at this Agency?

This question is one where you do not want to respond with an answer along the lines of, “Um, I don’t know” or “because the agency is located close to my home”. Most Agencies do not want to waste their time with students who are uninterested in the work they do. At the very least, research the Agency so you understand if this placement is for you.

Adding personal touches when answering this question can go a long way: something along the lines of, “I appreciate this Agency’s mission because...” or “I am interested in working with your client group because...” will make you more memorable. You obviously need to understand what things are important to the Agency.

2. What kinds of clients do you find most difficult to work with and why?

Being a social worker is stressful, and many social workers burn out quickly. Asking the above question helps Agency Supervisors get an idea of how students handle stress and how compatible they might be with their Agency.

Suggestions while developing your response:

- Bring some positivity in the answer
- No disparaging/blaming others or being overly negative
- Accepting some responsibility in the situation
- Be honest about your cultural biases
A good answer might be, "I find that the most difficult clients are those who have given up. That is, they've been failed by others and the system so many times that it feels like I can never reach them. They're a good reminder to myself that I need to remain curious and to approach issues from multiple angles because all clients deserve my best."

3. Why do you want to be a social work?

People go into social work for different reasons, and asking about their motivations gives Agency Supervisors some insight into a student’s background that they might not be able to otherwise.

Suggestions while developing your response:

- Going beyond a generic "desire to help others"
- Specifics versus generalities
- A commitment to social work

An effective candidate could answer, "My grandfather died of cancer when I was 10, and the hospice nurses and social workers paved the way for him to die at home and on his own terms. That experience opened my eyes to how I could help others advocate for themselves."

4. What strategies do you use for crisis intervention?

Conflict is inevitable in any field of social work, and this question allows Agency Supervisors to check whether the student’s conflict-resolution skills fit with the Agency’s culture. The interviewer can also use it to check if the candidate is prioritizing skills required for the placement.

Suggestions while developing your response:

- Strategies that align with what the Agency wants
- Drawing from your past experience to the context to the relevant Area of Practice (this might be even if you do not have relevant job experience)
- Lack of blaming others
- If you do not have any relevant work experience, draw upon your life experience and correlate a few key relevant Social Work theories into your response.

A good answer might be, "When I worked at a women’s shelter, many of the residents would get upset when a routine changed. I started being more proactive by explaining up front and clearly what the plan for the day would be. When a crisis occurred, I used restatement, clarification and 'I' statements to ensure everyone was on the same page."
5. **How well do you work with other people?**

A Social Worker is always required to work with multiple groups of people from different backgrounds. If you love people, this question will be easy for you. However, if you are introverted or shy, an answer to this question may be slightly more difficult.

More likely than not, you will be required to work with other people in some sort of team setting. Describe your past experience of working as part of a team and how you handled situations. If you are not a natural leader, mention that you enjoy taking on the role of supporter and showcase how you add value in the team.

6. **Tell me about yourself.**

An “elevator pitch” is a 10- to 30-second summation of relevant aspects of your life and accomplishments. For this question, that pitch comes in handy.

The Agency does not want to know your entire life story, but they do want to know what makes you who you are in context of the Placement. Talk about relevant accomplishments and highlight key skills.

This is generally one of the first questions you may be asked. Respond to this confidently and remember that there is NO WRONG answer to this. However, your response to this question can help you make a good or bad impression.

**Preparing for Interviews**

**What can I do to De-emphasize Little or No Experience?**

Students worry that they will be asked about their lack of experience. To avoid overlooking relevant experiences, consider your significant past activities before the interview.

Do not overlook the types and ranges of activities to which you were exposed and do not minimize them. In addition, perhaps you did volunteer work or were employed prior to coming to ACAP. Make a list of the skills you needed to complete projects at University, extra-curricular activities, etc.

Link your past with what the current Agency requires, coupled with what you would like to develop at Placement.
Is It Wise to Admit My Weaknesses?

In an interview, the Agency may ask you to describe your “weaknesses”. Questions like: “what weaknesses do you have?” or “what aspect of the placement do you think might be most difficult?” may be raised. Therefore, consider any potential vulnerabilities, gaps in knowledge, skill, etc. you may have and think about how you will present them.

One approach is to accentuate the positive. For example, you can mention the issue but focus on how you have managed or hope to manage it. A second approach is to state a “weakness” and then reframe it into a trait that is positive. For example, someone might say that you push yourself too hard, but you may like to think of yourself as someone who strives for excellence.

Occasionally students have questions about whether or not medical diagnoses or personal problems should be mentioned during the interview. This should be discussed with the ACAP Placement Unit in the first instance before you go for the interview to the Agency.

Then, you and the Placement Unit can jointly decide on next steps. There are no simple rules on this matter; the advantages and disadvantages of revealing personally sensitive information must be weighed in each individual situation, but is usually handled successfully with adequate advance planning.

Some Other Questions:

1. Describe a few important skills you would bring to this placement and give examples of how you have successfully used these skills in the past.
2. In what type of environment do you work best?
3. What qualities are necessary for successful teamwork and collaboration?
4. Tell me about a project you have initiated. What prompted you to begin it and what was your process of putting it in motion?
5. What have you learned from some of your failures?
6. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
7. Describe an example of past conflict and demonstrate how you handled it.
8. Can you give me an example of a time when you experienced a stressful situation? How did you take care of yourself?
9. Do you have any personal experience with the issues we address at this agency that might affect your interaction with clients (domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism, adoption, grief and loss, etc.)? How do you think you will cope with witnessing our clients’ situations?
10. Describe a time when your cultural assumptions were challenged and how you handled this
11. What types of clients do you find challenging to work with? What are your thoughts on why that might be?
12. Where do you hope to be working in 3-5 years?
13. Why are you interested in this type of agency/program?
14. What interests you about our client population?
15. What do you hope to learn here?
16. What strengths do you bring to this field?
17. What are your areas of professional growth?
18. Tell us about a time when you demonstrated initiative and leadership.
19. What do you do when you are faced with an ethical conflict? Have you experienced this in your work or other aspects of life? What can you tell me about how you handled this?
20. Social work can be extremely stressful. How do you deal with stress on the job and how do you seek balance in your life? Please give us specific examples.
21. Field Education 2 Placement Specific Questions:
   a. What did you learn from your Field Education 1 placement that was valuable?
   b. How do you plan to use that information in the future?
   c. Is there anything you did in your placements that you are particularly proud?