

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (M.S.W.)

Overview of the M.S.W. Program

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OVERVIEW OF THE M.S.W. PROGRAM

While the discipline of social work dates all the way back to the mid-1800s, Western Michigan University's School of Social Work was not established until 1968. Previously, however, many social work courses were offered through the WMU department of sociology. The transition to a professional school was therefore a relatively easy one. Many new faculty members were hired, new courses were developed, and both bachelor's and master's degrees were offered to provide students with the appropriate credentials to practice in the field.

Soon the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited the M.S.W. program, and a B.S.W. program was approved in the late 1970s. In 1976, the University added the College of Health and Human Services to its administrative roster, of which the School of Social Work became a member so that the goal of recognizing the integral relationship between physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being could be attained.

M.S.W. PROGRAM EDUCATIONAL GOALS

The educational goals of the School of Social Work's master of social work program are to prepare social work practitioners at the beginning and advanced professional levels that have mastered the theory, knowledge, and skills necessary for competent practice. Advanced levels of practice include interpersonal practice and policy, planning, and administration.

The MSW program goals are:

- To provide a professional education that prepares advanced practitioners to enhance, advocate, and support social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people
- To prepare advanced practitioners who demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively with diverse, vulnerable, and underserved populations
- To prepare advanced practitioners who possess critical thinking skills, embrace social work values, have the requisite skills needed to formulate and realize a vision of a just society and are committed to lifelong learning
- To prepare ethical, reflective, and competent advanced practitioners to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and institutions within a global and changing environment
- To prepare advanced practitioners who effectively intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and institutions by utilizing evidence-based knowledge and theories and guided by person-centered ecological models
- To prepare advanced practitioners who possess the knowledge and skills necessary to consumer and produce social work knowledge and the ability to actively participate in the evaluation of professional practice
- To prepare advanced practitioners who are grounded in a bio-psycho-social framework, understand the historical roots of the social work professional, and can develop and utilize social policy.

The School's program goals reflect content from the EPAS (see Appendix A). The overall School of Social Work objectives are operationalized in the objectives of the M.S.W. program's curricular units (see M.S.W. foundation and concentration sections). These unit levels provide an important planning and monitoring tool to aid the faculty and administration in moving the School of Social Work ahead in meeting its mission. Objectives regarding the preparation of social work practitioners are specified in each curricular unit's expected educational outcomes and in the learning objectives for each course. Ultimately, these outcomes are measured by assessing student performances in each course and by using the other assessment tools.

The objectives of the foundation and the concentration are implemented, monitored, and evaluated through a system of master and exemplar syllabi developed under the direction of the curriculum committee and concentration committees. A master syllabus is developed for each course and includes a course description, objectives, and topics that must be a part of each section of a course. An exemplar syllabus complements the master syllabus for each course by presenting a semester-length sample plan for the course, including scheduled readings and assignments.

The School of Social Work's objectives are implemented in the M.S.W. program through the foundation and the two concentrations; interpersonal practice (IP) and policy, planning, and administration (PP&A).

M.S.W. FIELD EDUCATION

Field Hours

The field placement courses, Social Work 6710 and Social Work 6720 are taken concurrently with the practice courses Social Work 6610 and Social Work 6620. Students receive three (3) credits for each field course. Students begin field placement in the fall and continue through the spring semester (September-April).

The School of Social Work requires that a minimum of 428 hours be completed for the academic year working approximately 16-hours per work week. Field lab hours and seminar and do not count towards required field hours. The idea is to log approximately 16 hours per week to allow for a full range of learning experiences, overtime, which should go until the end of the semester. It is important for these learning experiences to build over the course of each semester. Students are encouraged to log a few additional hours to cover an unexpected absence or an illness, but the bulk of the required hours must be logged continuously and contiguously over the course of the semester(s).

M.S.W. Foundation full-time Field Placement Hours*

CSWE requires M.S.W. foundation students to log 428 hours per academic year. Student field hours, in concert with the field laboratories, breaks down as follows:

Fall

Weeks 1-2	Attend lab only	0 hours
Weeks 3-8	Attend lab and start field placement 12 hours per week (6 x 12)	72 hours
Weeks 9-14	Attend field placement 16 hours per week (6 x 16)	<u>96 hours</u>
Total Fall		168 hours

Spring

Weeks 1-15	Attend field placement 16 hrs per week (15 x 16)	240 hours
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168 hours available in fall + 240 hours available in spring = 408 hours
 428 CSWE required hours, so **an additional 20 hours need to be made up over the course of the academic year.**

M.S.W. Foundation **extended study** Field Placement Hours*

CSWE requires M.S.W. foundation students to log 428 hours per academic year.
 Student field hours in concert with the field laboratories breaks down as follows:

Fall

Weeks 1-2	Attend lab only	0 hours
Weeks 3-8	Attend lab and start field placement 16 hours per week (6 x 16)	96 hours
Weeks 9-14	Attend field placement 16 hours per week (6 x 16)	<u>96 hours</u>
		192 Total Fall

Spring

Weeks 1-15	Attend field placement 16 hours per week (15 x 16)	240 hours
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192 hours available in fall + 240 hours available in spring = 432 hours
 CSWE requires 428 total hours

****The total number of hours per semester may vary depending on the number of weeks available in each semester. Students will be required to make up any hours needed to satisfy the CSWE requirements.***

The faculty liaison, through contact with the field instructor, monitors fieldwork time. Students, at times, may also be asked to attend their field placements during the University breaks for a few hours so that client relationships are maintained. This is decided between the student and their field instructor. Some activities outside the agency may be counted as field hours if approved by the field instructor and faculty liaison; examples include attending Legislative Education and Advocacy Day or attending a conference on a topic related to work in the field agency. A sample time log can be found in Appendix H.

Extended-Study Students

Extended-study students who are employed particularly need to be aware that they should commit an average of 16 hours per work week to their field placement in the second and third year of their program. Completing both the field placements is a huge commitment and needs upfront planning by the student and his/her employer. This means that students need to start working with their employers early on to develop a plan to change their work schedule by either dropping the number of hours they will work during the week or utilizing vacation time so that the field hours can be accomplished during the work week. Without the ability to work this out with an employer, it is basically impossible for an extended-study student to complete the M.S.W. program. It is very rare to find a field placement agency that is able to provide learning opportunities and supervision for a student in the evenings and on the weekends.

Field Laboratories

In addition to an agency-related orientation coordinated by the field instructor, students are introduced to the field education program in a series of **eight (8) required field**

education laboratories which are scheduled for 2.5 hours each and conducted by the faculty liaison during the fall semester. During these sessions, the faculty liaisons familiarize and orient students to the general nature of the program and field education through discussion of program, agency, and faculty expectations. The field labs focus on teaching communication skills, enhancing group cohesiveness, interviewing skills, the development of a field placement learning contract, and socializing students to the social work profession. Techniques such as attending, reflection of feelings, clarification, and summarizing are presented through modeling, supervised role-playing, peer feedback, and may include video and audio taping. The field lab also includes a beginning and basic introduction to safety issues in the field which includes awareness, assessment, and interventions in potentially risky situations. The training is didactic as well as experiential. Refer to the chapter in this manual on student safety.

Field Seminars

M.S.W. foundation students also participate in three (3) seminars which are scheduled by the faculty liaison during the first-year field placement. **Students are required to attend all scheduled seminars.**

The seminars focus on the students' field experiences and provide a forum to discuss their placement with their peers and the faculty liaison. There are also opportunities to discuss the integration of their field experience with other foundation courses that they are taking or have completed. Seminar assignments may include written and oral work. Usually the first seminar is held towards the end of the fall semester, the second early in the spring semester, and the third towards the end of the spring semester.