

Western Michigan University  
*School of Social Work*  
**MSW Student Handbook**

**Introduction**

In addition to the policies and procedures that affect all students listed in the common handbook, this handbook contains policies specific to graduate level students.

**MSW mission and program goals**

<b>Mission</b>	<b>MSW Program Goals</b>
Educate social workers to advocate for <b>social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people</b>	Enhance, advocate, and support <b>social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people</b>
Educate social workers to advocate for <b>social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people</b>	To work effectively with <b>diverse, vulnerable, and underserved populations.</b>
<b>Social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people</b>	Critical thinking skills, embrace social work values, and have the requisite skills needed to formulate and realize a vision of a <b>just society.</b>
Leadership on a <b>local, national, and international</b> level through research, scholarship, community service and partnerships	Work with <b>organizations, communities, and institutions within a global</b> and changing environment
Leadership on a <b>local, national, and international</b> level through research, scholarship, community service and partnerships	intervene with individuals, families, groups, <b>organizations, communities, and institutions</b> by utilizing <b>evidence-based knowledge</b>
<b>Research, scholarship</b>	<b>Consume and produce social work knowledge</b> and the ability to actively participate in the evaluation of professional practice.
<b>Advocate for social and economic justice and personal well-being for all people</b>	Analyze, develop, and utilize <b>social policy.</b>

**PROGRAM PREPARATION**

**Minimizing Redundancy in the Programs of Study**

Students who graduated from an accredited bachelor of social work program or who started a graduate social work program in another accredited MSW program are entitled to seek relief from redundancy in their program of study in the MSW curriculum. Adjustments to a program of study may be accomplished through the transfer of graduate credits. The policies and practices pertaining to the transfer of graduate credits are presented below. Students are advised to read these materials carefully. Students who are uncertain about their qualifications for an adjustment to their programs of study are encouraged to confer with the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach. Students are advised to apply for transfer of credits upon being admitted. Requests for transfers of credits will not be accepted after the end of the first semester of enrollment.

**Work and Life Experience Policy**

**In conformance with the requirements of the Council on Social Work Education, the School of Social Work cannot grant social work course credit or field hours for life experience or previous work experience.**

### **Program Orientation**

Orientation events are held on respective campuses prior to the start of the MSW program. If you are unable to attend the orientation event, please contact your campus program coordinator for a make-up date or online training option.

Beginning with incoming students for the Fall 2017 semester, the MSW program provides an online orientation. This orientation is mandatory and replaces the face-to-face orientation that was used in the past. This change is intended to assist students with time management, travel, and work and family obligations.

### **Transfer of Credits**

Transfer of credits refers to a process in which graduate course credits earned in another department at WMU, or at another accredited institution of higher education, are transferred into a student's WMU School of Social Work academic record.

1. The Graduate College at WMU requires that in order to transfer graduate credits, students must have achieved at least a grade of "B" (3.0 on 4.0 scale) in each transfer course in order to be considered AND the student must have earned a cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0 for the transfer to be approved. The full Graduate College transfer policy can be [found here](#).
2. If the course was taken outside of WMU, an official transcript must be sent to the Graduate College Admissions office at: [graduate-transcripts@wmich.edu](mailto:graduate-transcripts@wmich.edu) or Western Michigan University, Office of Admissions, 1903 W Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5211 USA.
3. **Students with graduate credits from another CSWE accredited school of social work** may transfer up to 30 semester credit hours if courses were completed within six years of the student's expected graduation from WMU. Transfer of course credits may be applied to Foundation, Concentration, and elective course requirements. Students who transfer from an accredited school of social work must complete at least 30 credit hours of course requirements in the MSW Program at WMU.
4. **Students with non-social work graduate course credits** from an accredited graduate program may transfer up to twelve course credits if earned within six years of the student's expected graduation from WMU. Credits that would be more than six years old by completion of the program will not qualify. In most cases, credits are used as electives.
5. Students seeking transfer of course credits to satisfy MSW **elective** requirements must meet with their advisor and discuss the possible credit transfer and the impact it will have on the student's permanent program plan.
6. Students seeking transfer of course credits to replace MSW course requirements other than electives must submit a Request for Departmental Credit Approval form. This form is available on our website at [wmich.edu/socialwork/forms](http://wmich.edu/socialwork/forms). This form is not necessary for the

approval of electives, which can be approved by the students' advisor and indicated on their program plan. The Departmental Credit Approval form will be reviewed by the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach, who will determine if the course has been pre-approved by the curriculum committee, or if it needs to be submitted to the faculty curriculum committee for review. The form will be returned to the student with a decision. A copy will be kept in their student file. Please note that approved transferred graduate credits will not appear on your transcript until graduation. The decisions of the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach, the Curriculum Committee Chair are final. Upon being informed of the decisions, the student must confer with his or her advisor to develop a plan of study to meet the remaining requirements.

7. If a student fails (i.e. DC, D, E, X, or NC) a required MSW course, the student is required to retake that same course in the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. The student cannot use or transfer an equivalent course from another program or university.

### **Registration for Newly Admitted Graduate Students**

Incoming students are provided a complete course schedule for their program during orientation. Online copies of the schedule and program plans can be found at [www.wmich.edu/socialwork/forms](http://www.wmich.edu/socialwork/forms). Additionally, course offerings can be found at <https://wmich.edu/classlookup/>.

### **WMU Policy: Credit Hour Requirements for “Full-time” and “Part-time” Status**

For all graduate students taking courses for a stated degree or certificate program, six hours constitutes full-time status, and three hours constitutes half-time status in Fall and Spring semesters. In the Summer I and Summer II sessions, three hours in either session constitutes full-time status for that session and two hours constitutes half-time status. Students must be aware that FICA regulations and some federal loan deferment regulations require at least half-time enrollment, which at WMU is now at least three hours of enrollment. Please note that even our extended study program plan meets the university's definition of full-time status, if followed as advised.

Since enrollment fees are determined by hours enrolled, and not by full- or part-time status, students (whether graduate or undergraduate) who enroll for four or fewer hours are charged a lesser enrollment fee than those who enroll for five or more hours, and consequently they will be required to pay an additional fee for unlimited use of the recreation center. Students enrolling for four or fewer hours will have access to the recreation center for 10 visits without extra fee charges.

### **Registering in courses which are full**

The Program Coordinator of the School is the only person who can approve a temporary increase in a course cap. No section of a course will be over-enrolled if another section of the same course has seats available, nor will the capacity of a course be increased more than 20% without the expressed consent of the instructor (per faculty contract). Requests for registration in a course which is at capacity should be addressed to the Program Coordinator in writing along with proper justification.

### **Financial Aid Resources at the School of Social Work**

#### **Graduate Assistantships**

The School of Social Work employs graduate assistants to facilitate the program objectives of the school and the professional or teaching objectives of faculty members. Graduate assistants are expected to enroll in a specified number of credit hours, and devote 20 hours (full-time) or 10 hours (part-time) to working in a university department. **Students may apply for any graduate**

**assistantships they are qualified for, including those outside the School of Social Work.**

University-wide postings are available at <https://wmich.edu/career>.

The number of assistants hired in the social work school varies by year based on available funding and department or faculty projects. Students with evidence of professional academic interest and abilities for meeting specific programmatic needs receive priority consideration for appointment as graduate assistants. Scholastic merit and/or financial need will be considered, but are secondary to the stated priority. For more information about social work assistantship opportunities, please contact the Office of Admissions and Student Services.

**The Veterans Administration Traineeship**

This is available to second year students only. Awards are based upon potential for professional work in a clinical setting. Priority will be given to those interested in V.A. employment following completion of training. Application should be made to the Veterans Administration Hospital after consultation with the Coordinator of Field Education in the School of Social Work. *The Veterans Administration and the School jointly select the V.A. Trainee.*

**Student Loans**

While the federal government does not offer grants to graduate level students, federal loans are available through the FAFSA process. More information is available from the [Office of Student Financial Aid](#) at (269) 387-6000 and online.

**Graduate Program Advising**

Advising is an important aspect of the educational experience. The goal of advising is to facilitate matriculation, adhere to University policy, and eventually graduate every social work student. Advising is a collective enterprise which requires active participation and frequent communication on the part of every member of the School of Social Work community. Advisors are assigned to students by their respective program coordinators. The School of Social Work strives for consistency with advising assignments Whenever possible, the school seeks to . The first advising meeting is crucial as it explains program requirements and curricular matters such as transfer of course credit, field instruction, and professional issues. For the sake of continuity, main campus students have the same academic advisor for the entirety of their programs. Grand Rapids and Benton Harbor students are assigned advisors by the Program Coordinator.

Advisors are available during office hours and by appointment. Some faculty members do not work during the summer. If your advisor is not contracted to work during the summer and you are in need of immediate assistance, please contact the Program Coordinator of the School or the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach to connect with a summer contracted advisor.

Advisors familiarize themselves with the special circumstances and individual concerns of each student to whom they are assigned. Students are strongly encouraged to inform their advisor whenever they are experiencing difficulties either academically or with their field placement. The advisor may learn of difficulties from the student, involved faculty, and/or the School administration. It is the responsibility of the advisor to communicate with the student whenever he or she is experiencing difficulty. If necessary, the advisor will participate in the Professional Review Committee process. More information about the **Professional Review Committee process** can be found in the common student handbook.

### **Advising: Student Responsibilities**

The student is responsible for:

1. Being knowledgeable about all degree requirements as specified in the School of Social Work [Graduate Catalog](#). Students must use the Graduate Catalog that is in effect at the time of their initial enrollment,
2. Completion of all evaluative instruments associated with the advisement process,
3. Managing his or her academic program as designed with the assistance of the advisor. This includes enrolling in courses in the sequence specified in your program plan using the University registration process each semester; doing this during advance registration is encouraged,
4. Notifying the advisor of any changes that affect the outcome of the student's planned academic program,
5. Making appointments for advising,
6. Participating in the development of the "Program Plan of Study,"
7. Requesting a "Transfer of Credit,"
8. Obtaining transcripts that are to be used for transfer of credit (other than WMU),
9. Requesting a "Change of Program" when changes are made,
10. Requesting any exceptions to degree requirements,
11. Applying for graduation before the given deadline,
12. Keeping the Social Work Admissions Office informed of changes of residence and/or employment after graduation.

### **Advisor Responsibilities**

The advisor is responsible for:

1. Being knowledgeable about all degree requirements,
2. Participating with the student in the development of the student's official program plan of study,
3. Submitting the "Transfer of Credit" form to the Social Work Admissions Office, if appropriate,
4. Submitting any exceptions to degree requirements to the Curriculum Committee and/or the Graduate College,
5. Approving a student's official program plan of study,
6. Submitting the "Program Plan of Study" to the Social Work Admissions Office;
7. Submitting the "Change of Program" form to the Social Work Admissions Office, if appropriate,
8. Counseling a student who wishes to withdraw from the School and recording this information in the student's file.

Students may request a change in advisor by contacting the appropriate program coordinator.

Program coordinators will attempt to honor a student's request for a new advisor. However, the School does not guarantee a new advisor. Feedback about an advisor can be provided through an [online form](#).

### **Choosing a Concentration**

Advanced standing students must select a concentration prior to enrolling in coursework. Full-time and Extended study students are encouraged to meet with their advisor during the fall semester of their first year and discuss the differences between the *Interpersonal Practice Concentration* and the *Policy, Planning and Administration Concentration*. In addition, talking with other faculty members and practicing social workers may help to make a decision. Students must choose a concentration by the end of their first semester in the program. Once you decide upon a concentration you must fill

out the [Concentration Declaration Form](#), have it signed by your advisor, and turn it into the Office of Admissions and Student Services.

### **Permanent Program Plan of Study**

All MSW students must complete a Permanent Program Plan of Study. Program plan forms can be found on the student documents page: <http://www.wmich.edu/socialwork/forms>. Full-time and Extended-study programs require students to complete 60 credit hours of approved course work. The Advanced-standing program requires students to complete 39 credit hours of approved course work. The scheduling of course-work follows a rigid sequence of prerequisites and required courses. Students have flexibility in the planning for elective courses.

Before filling out a program plan, students need to schedule an appointment with their advisor to review interests and career goals. The advisor serves to assist the student in deciding upon courses that will further their career goals. Once the student has decided upon electives, he/she must complete the "Permanent Program Plan of Study" and have it signed by their advisor.

Program plans should be completed during the first semester with the assistance of an advisor. All exceptions to the program plan must be approved by an advisor and placed in the student's file. Requests for transfer credits, accompanied by appropriate documentation, must be first approved by the advisor and then forwarded to the Chair of the Curriculum Committee for further action.

It is the student's responsibility to accurately complete the program plan of study, have it signed by an advisor, and turn it in with the graduation application and fee to the Registrar's Office. The graduation auditor will determine if you have met all degree requirements using the permanent program plan of study. It is imperative that the [Permanent Program Plan of Study](#) and the graduation application be turned in by the due date for the semester in which you expect to graduate. Otherwise graduation may be delayed.

### **Completing a Permanent Program Plan of Study**

#### **Fall Semester:**

All **first-year full-time and extended-study students** must meet with their assigned advisor to discuss options for program electives and to complete a draft of the Permanent Program Plan of Study. By the end of the fall semester, students must submit their completed and signed Program Plan of Study to their advisor for inclusion in their student file.

### **Changes in the Permanent Program Plan of Study**

A student may not make changes in their schedule of courses without the advice and guidance of their advisor in order to understand the ramifications of such changes. If changes are to be made the advisor will complete a *Change of Program* form that will accompany the student's program plan when it is sent to the Registrar's Office. If this form is not correctly submitted the graduation auditor will inform the student that they cannot graduate without taking the courses documented in the *Permanent Program Plan of Study*. Any changes to the permanent program plan should be sent to the Registrar's Office no later than at the time of the submission of the graduation application.

### **Electives**

All MSW students must complete nine credit hours of electives to support individual learning needs and specialized areas of interest. Electives must be 5000-level or above and can be chosen from any department within WMU or from other institutions. Courses chosen must be relevant to the student's

professional goals and interests. Students may want to consider the course offerings of the WMU Extended University Programs, which offers courses at the Regional Centers: Battle Creek, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Muskegon, and St. Joseph. There are also graduate weekend college offerings that may meet student needs. A schedule of these offerings can be accessed through <http://www.wmich.edu/online/courses>. Additional fees may apply to online or Extended University Program coursework.

Those students pursuing certificates may use some of the requirements of the certificate program to satisfy the elective requirement of the School of Social Work. Advisors should assist students with exploring specialization options prior to signing up for electives.

Students wanting to take a 3000-4000 level course to meet elective requirements must seek an *Exception to Policy*. To petition for a such an exception, students must meet with their academic advisor to discuss the nature of the request. If the academic advisor agrees with the student's choice(s) and rationale, the advisor will make a request to the Curriculum Committee for the exception on behalf of the student.

### **Independent Study**

Individual study in social welfare or other social work related topics of interest may be taken for one to four hours of credit. A full time faculty member must agree to mentor an independent project and facilitate the proposal through the Curriculum Committee approval process. The [SWRK5980 form](#) must be completed, signed by the student and faculty member, the Chair of the Curriculum Committee once approved by that body, and the School Director **prior to registration**. Please note that the Graduate College will approve a maximum of four credit hours for any independent study course.

### **Advanced Competency Compendium**

The Advanced Competency Compendium is a collection of completed work from concentration courses that demonstrate students' competencies. Make sure to save digital copies of each ACC assignment in all concentration level courses as you complete them. The full ACC will be submitted in your SWRK 6900 course. Instructions for how to compile this collection and complete the cover sheet, as well as how it will be graded, are included in the document below. The ACC will be used as aggregate data to report to our accrediting body, CSWE, around the outcomes of our program.

### **Field Education**

WMU is proud to offer quality field education opportunities to students to develop professional-level competencies in social work. Field education involves coordination among four key groups of people to assure the student of a high-quality learning experience:

1. The student is the central focus of the learning experience,
2. The field education coordinator who is in charge of the field education office,
3. The field instructor is the social worker at the field placement who will oversee the student's educational experiences at the agency, and provide professional supervision, and
4. The faculty liaison who is the university's instructor of record for the field education course.

For more information on field education, <https://wmich.edu/socialwork/academics/field>.

### **School of Social Work Specializations**

Specializations are an opportunity to further tailor your educational career towards your specific interests. Specializations are not required. Some specializations and certificate programs may extend your graduation date. To elect a specialization, please fill out the specialization declaration form at <https://wmich.edu/socialwork/forms> with your advisor.

### **School Social Work**

The School Social Work curriculum consists of nine credits beginning in the Summer II session. These courses are sequential and cannot be taken out of order. If interested in pursuing the School Social Work specialization, schedule an appointment with the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach, who also serves as the School Social Work Coordinator.

### **Trauma across the lifespan**

The trauma specialization prepares Interpersonal Practice concentration students to provide evidence-based clinical services to those with a history of trauma across the lifespan, including children, adolescents, adults, survivors and perpetrators; and those who have experienced a wide range of traumas, such as child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, community violence, combat, witnessing violence, human trafficking, natural disasters and/or traumatic accidents.

### **TF-CBT**

The WMU School of Social Work offers a unique training opportunity in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) for students in the Clinical Social Work concentration. This includes specialized course work and concentration field placements that offer training and supervision in TF-CBT, with TF-CBT trained field instructors. TF-CBT is a best practice treatment modality for working with youth who have experienced trauma. This specialization requires a screening with the specialization coordinator.

### **CHHS Certificate Programs**

The College of Health and Human Services also hosts the following specializations/graduate certificates. Please follow the links for application information.

### **Specialty Program in Alcohol and Drug Abuse (SPADA)**

The benefits of completing the SPADA certificate while matriculating in the School of Social Work include:

- the field experience requirements of both programs can be completed at the same field site if the field site is approved by both programs, and
- social work students must be enrolled in 1 credit of SPADA Field Practicum (ADA 5700) instead of 3 credits of ADA 6700.

### **Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness**

The Graduate Certificate in Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness program introduces students to integrative and complementary modalities that promote optimal health and healing at both academic and experiential levels. Students are exposed to a variety of topics and encouraged to carefully evaluate the research on evidence-based holistic practices.

Combining the certificate program with your Social Work degree will add value to your employability. Holistic perspectives and competencies enhance graduates' professional effectiveness and equip students for career advancement in health and human service fields. A focus on self-care and stress reduction provides students with skills that help them and help reduce burnout.



Matriculating in the School of Social Work include:

- the field experience requirements of both programs can be completed at the same field site if the field site is approved by both programs, and
- social work students must be enrolled in 1 credit of the Holistic Health Field Practicum (HOL 7120) instead of 3 credits of HOL 6700.

### **School of Social Work Academic Regulations and Requirements**

In addition to the several policy statements included below, the University's Student Code and general academic policies may be found, respectively, on the following Western Michigan University websites: <http://www.wmich.edu/conduct/> and [www.wmich.edu/registrar](http://www.wmich.edu/registrar).

#### **Repeat policy for graduate students**

The University Curriculum Review Policy states that no more than two courses may be retaken and no course may be repeated more than once during the student's graduate career at WMU except for courses that are stipulated as repeatable for credit (e.g., variable topics courses). Individual departments have the ability to limit this further. The School of Social Work limits the number of repeatable course to one (instead of two).

Permission to retake a course must be obtained from the program advisor and program coordinator before registration for the course to be repeated can occur. The original grade for the course will remain on the student's transcript, and both the original and repeated course grade are computed into the degree program grade point average.

#### **Requesting a Change of Course Scheduling**

Graduate students must follow the course schedule for their program and make no changes without first consulting their advisor. If changes are needed (either to move between full-time and extended study, change campuses, or change course order. Etc.):

1. The student must submit a written program change request to their advisor with a rationale for the change. The student must provide the advisor with an accurate and completed Program Plan of Study that includes all changes,
2. The advisor then meets with the student to review the request and ensure that the student is aware of the consequences of the requested changes if there are any. If the change does not violate any pre-requisite requirements the advisor may approve the change. If the change requires approval due to pre-requisite requirements then:
  - a. The request and the Program Plan are forwarded to the Curriculum Committee Chair for review and a decision,
  - b. The Curriculum Committee Chair reviews the materials and approves or denies the requested changes, or consults with the Curriculum Committee as a whole,
  - c. The Curriculum Committee Chair sends the final decision to the student, the advisor, and Manager of Recruitment and Outreach,
  - d. The student is responsible for sending the approved program change to the Office of the Registrar in a timely fashion.

If this procedure is not followed, the student may be at risk for a delayed graduation and/or the need for a Professional Review Committee (PRC) hearing.