

Western Michigan University
School of Social Work

MSW Student Handbook

Mission: The Western Michigan University School of Social Work's mission is to *become* a learner-centered school that develops social work leaders to impact social, economic, and environmental justice *through* excellence in research and practice.

Vision: The Western Michigan University School of Social Work's vision is to work together in respectful, inclusive, and empowering ways towards social, economic, and environmental justice through excellence in research and practice, and personal well-being for all.

This vision will be met through our action steps:

1. Strengthen students' critical thinking skills, helps them formulate a vision of a just society, and enables them to move towards the realization of their vision.
2. Prepare ethical, competent, reflective practitioners to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and institutions within a global and changing environment.
3. Foster trauma-informed, culturally responsive, anti-racist practice, and
4. Nurture a respectful, inclusive, equitable environment that maximizes the contributions and development of students, faculty, and staff members

Master of Social Work Program Goals

The program mission and vision are supported by its pursuit of the following MSW program goals:

1. To provide a professional education that prepares advanced practitioners to enhance, advocate, and support social, economic, and environmental justice and personal well-being for all people.
2. To prepare advanced practitioners who demonstrate the knowledge, skills, values, cognitive and affective processes necessary to work effectively with diverse, vulnerable, and marginalized populations.
3. To prepare advanced practitioners who possess the needed knowledge, embrace social work values, and have the requisite skills needed to formulate and realize a vision of a just society.
4. To prepare ethical, reflective, and competent advanced practitioners in Clinical Social Work to work with individuals, families, and groups; and in Policy, Planning, and Administration to work with organizations, communities, and institutions within a global and changing environment.
5. To prepare advanced practitioners to effectively engage, assess, and intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, and institutions by utilizing evidence-based knowledge and theories and guided by trauma informed, culturally responsive, and anti-racist models of practice.
6. To prepare advanced practitioners with the knowledge, skills, values, cognitive and affective processes necessary to engage in practice informed research and research informed practice, and the ability to evaluate social work practice at micro, mezzo, and macro system levels.
7. To prepare advanced practitioners who are grounded in a cultural-bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework, understand the historical roots of the social work profession, and can analyze,

develop, and utilize social policy to advance justice.

MSW Program Options:

Standard Master of Social Work (60 Credits):

The graduate professional program in social work at Western Michigan University prepares you for direct-service and leadership positions in the field of social welfare. It begins with a twenty-four-hour foundation curriculum, including classes on human behavior, social policy, culture/ethnicity, research and social work practice and introduces different approaches to problem solving. This foundation will prepare you for entry into one of two concentrations: Clinical practice or policy, planning and administration. Field education provides opportunities for practical experience under supervision by a seasoned social work professional in a human service setting. Standard MSW students will complete one 400 hour internship over two semesters, and one 500 hour concentration internship over two semesters. The School of Social Work admits for this program once a year, with classes starting each fall semester. Both a full-time (2 year, 12-15 credits per semester) and a part-time/extended study (3 year, 6 credits per semester year round) are available.

Advanced Standing Master of Social Work (39 Credits):

Students who have obtained a **Bachelor's of Social Work degree from a Council on Social Work Education accredited school within the last six years and have a minimum GPA of 3.25** (calculated using the most recent 60 credits) are eligible to apply for the Advanced Standing program. This 39 credit program builds on the BSW foundation courses, allowing students to complete their MSW in a shorter period of time than those without a BSW. Advanced Standing students will complete one 500 hour internship over two semesters. The School of Social Work admits for this program once a year, with classes starting each Summer 2 semester (July). Both a full-time (10 month, 12-15 credits per semester) and a part-time (2 years, 6 credit per semester) schedule are available.

Accelerated MSW Program:

(Available to current WMU undergraduate students only). Once a BSW student has obtained 60 credits with a minimum overall grade point average of 3.0 (either at WMU in the social work major or have obtained 60 credits from an institution that has a shared articulation agreement with the School of Social Work), students may apply to the accelerated MSW program. This program allows students to take 12 credits of graduate-level foundation social work classes (SWRK 6100, SWRK 6310, SWRK 6330, and SWRK 6400) in place of the traditional undergraduate social work courses. These 12 credits will count both as credits towards their undergraduate degree and as graduate credits. Interested students must apply to the graduate program by April 1 of each year to dually enroll in graduate and undergraduate social work programs the following fall. If a student is accepted into this program and maintains all standards, an offer of admissions to the graduate program at WMU School of Social Work will be automatic. If a student achieves a 3.25 GPA and receives no more than one grade below a "B" in a social work required course, then they will be offered admissions to the Advanced Standing MSW program (see graduate catalog). If the student maintains a 3.0 but does not meet the 3.25 requirements, they will continue into the Accelerated MSW program, which will require 48 graduate credit hours (12 fewer credits than a standard MSW). This allows students to secure a path to graduate school early in their undergraduate education and provides an opportunity to complete both degrees

in a shorter period of time and at a lower cost.

Schedule and Campus Locations:

While undergraduate students both from the Benton Harbor Campus and the Kalamazoo campus are eligible to apply, campus locations of the courses will vary based on the size of the cohort in any given year.

Interested? Find the process for applying here: <https://wmich.edu/registrar/students-forms-accelerateddegree>

Concentrations:

The School of Social Work offers two concentrations.

- [Policy, Planning, and Administration](#)
This concentration prepares students for leadership in government, nonprofit, and community organizations. The PP&A Concentration seeks to empower practitioners to facilitate changes in the structures and processes of organizations, communities, and society to contribute to (a) a just distribution of resources and opportunities, (b) the ability of officials and the citizenry to understand and respond appropriately to systemic oppression, and (c) the empowerment of vulnerable, marginalized people.
- [Clinical Social Work](#)
This concentration prepares students for advanced clinical practice with individuals, families, and groups within diverse community contexts. Clinical practice emphasizes transactions between people and environments, preparing students to develop practice knowledge, skills, values, cognitive and affective processes in the following areas: (a) the promotion and enhancement of psychological, social, and biological well-being; (b) the amelioration of psychological, social, and biological dysfunction; and (c) the integration of theory, evidence-based practice and research knowledge.

Specializations:

Built into your MSW program are nine elective credit hours. Students may choose to apply these elective credits to any graduate-level course relevant to their degree or apply them towards a specialization. Most specializations fit within the 9 credit hours of electives and do not extend time to graduation (with SPADA being the exception). All specialization options are available to Clinical Practice students. Only Gerontology and Holistic Health are available to Policy, Planning and Administration students, due to the nature of the required internships for the other specializations. Click on the hyperlinks below to learn more.

Within the School of Social Work

- [Trauma Specialization](#)
- [Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(TF-CBT\)](#)
- [School Social Work](#)

College of Health and Human Services Collaborative Specializations

- [Special Programs in Alcohol and Drug Abuse \(SPADA\)](#)

- [Gerontology](#)
- [Holistic Health](#)

Field Education:

Field education is a significant, impactful and engaging part of social work education. It is where students practice the knowledge, skills, and values of the social work program, and learn to be a professional social worker in practice. This intensive focus on field education is unique in social work education, and is what makes it our signature pedagogy. Please note that most internships require daytime availability. For additional information about field education see the Field Manual at <https://wmich.edu/socialwork/academics/field/manual>

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 *Clinical Concentration* and *Policy, Planning and Administration Concentration*. If uncertain about how to make this choice, talking with other faculty members and practicing social workers may help. Students must choose a concentration by the end of their first semester in the program. This is formalized by completing the [Concentration Declaration Form](#), having it signed by the advisor and submitting it to the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach.

Permanent Program Plan of Study

All MSW students must complete a permanent program plan of study. Program plan forms are on the student documents page: <http://www.wmich.edu/socialwork/forms>. Full-time and Extended-study programs require completion of 60 credits of approved course work. The advanced-standing program requires completion of 39 credits of approved course work. Course scheduling follows a rigid sequence of required courses. However, students have flexibility in planning the nine elective credits.

Before filling out a program plan, students need to schedule an appointment with their advisor to review interests and career goals. Advisors assist students with decisions that will further their career goals by discussing things like electives. Once decisions have been made, students must complete the *permanent program plan of study*, which includes the advisor's signature.

Exceptions to the stipulated program plan must be approved by an advisor, in writing, and placed in the student's file. Requests for [transfer of credit\(s\)](#) must be approved by the advisor, and then forwarded to the chair of the curriculum committee for further action if necessary.

It is the student's responsibility to accurately complete the program plan of study, have it signed by an advisor, and submitted with the graduation application and fee to the Registrar's Office. Once reviewed by the graduation auditor, the student will be informed that all degree requirements have been met, or if something else needs to be done. It is imperative that the [permanent program plan of study](#) and the graduation application be submitted no later than the due date for the semester in which you expect to graduate, otherwise graduation will be delayed.

Completing a Permanent Program Plan of Study

Fall Semester:

All **first-year full-time and extended-study students** must meet with their 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 (Add what the student needs to do to get the knowledge, advice, and guidance from their advisor, e.g. make an appointment.

A student may not make changes in their schedule of courses without the knowledge, advice and guidance of their advisor in order to understand the ramifications of such changes. If changes are 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*. Changes to the permanent program plan should be sent to the Registrar's Office no later than the time the graduation application is submitted.

School of Social Work Academic Regulations and Requirements

In addition to the several policy statements included below, as a WMU student you are responsible for understanding and abiding by the [student code of conduct](#), and the general academic policies found on the [Registrar's Office](#) website.

[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 courses to one (instead of two).

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

Requesting a Change of Course Scheduling

Graduate students must follow the course schedule for their program and make no changes without consulting their advisor. If changes are needed (e.g., to move between full-time and extended study; change campuses; 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 a revised, accurate and completed program plan of study,
2. The advisor meets with the student to review the request and ensure that the

student is aware of the consequences, if there are any. If the change does not violate any pre- or co-requisite requirements the advisor may approve the change. If the change requires approval due to pre- or co-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 the 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 of delaying graduation and/or creating the need for a Professional Review Committee (PRC) hearing.

Independent Study:

Individualized study in social welfare or other social work-related topics may be pursued as an independent study. Credits for independent studies range between one and four credits. A full-time faculty member must agree to mentor a student interested in an independent project and facilitate the proposal through the curriculum committee review process. The [SWRK5980 form](#) must be completed, signed by the student and faculty member, and the chair of the curriculum committee. The school director must also approve the request **prior to course registration**. The graduate college will approve a maximum of four credits for an independent study course.

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

Program orientation is mandatory. Orientation is intended to acquaint students with faculty, resources and program expectations. Orientation events are held in advance of students beginning their course of study on all campuses where social work programming is offered. Anyone unable to attend the orientation event must contact the campus program coordinator.

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 Western Michigan University requires students to have achieved at least a grade of "B" (3.0 on 4.0 scale) in each course requested for transfer AND have earned a minimum cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0 in order for the credits to be approved. The complete Graduate College transfer policy can be found [here](#).

2. If the course was not taken at WMU, an official transcript must be sent to the Graduate College Admissions office at: 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 thirty (30) credits if courses were completed within six years of the student's expected graduation from WMU. Transfer of 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 credits in required courses 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 (12) credits if earned within six years of the student's expected graduation from WMU. In most cases, such credits are used as electives. Credits that would be more than six years old by completion of the program will not qualify.
5. Students seeking transfer of credits to satisfy MSW **elective** requirements must meet with their advisor to discuss possible credit transfer and its impact on the student's program plan of study.
6. Students seeking transfer of credits to replace MSW core course requirements must submit a *Request for Departmental Credit Approval* form. This form is available [here](#). The *Request for Departmental Credit Approval* form is reviewed to determine if a course has been pre-approved by the faculty curriculum committee, or if it needs to be submitted for review. The form is returned to the student with a decision, which is final. A copy of the form is kept in the student's file. Approved transfer credits do not appear on the transcript until graduation. Once informed of the decision(s), the student must confer with their advisor to develop a plan of study to meet the remaining requirements.

Additionally, transfer credits can only be added to the transcript by the registrar's office. Graduate students will need to complete the [graduate transfer evaluation and substitution form](#) in addition to the departmental form noted above.

7. If a student fails (i.e., DC, D, E, X, or NC) a required MSW course, they are required to retake that same course at 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 program plan outline during orientation. Online copies of program plans can be found here: www.wmich.edu/socialwork/forms. Course offerings can be found here: <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 credits constitutes full-time status, and three credits constitutes half-time status in Fall and Spring semesters. In the Summer I and Summer II sessions, three credits in either session constitutes full-time status for that specific session; two credits constitute half-time status. Students must be aware that FICA regulations, and some federal loan deferment regulations, require at least half-time status. *At WMU, this is at least three credits of enrollment.* Please note that the extended study program plans meet the WMU definition of full-time status, if followed as advised.

Because the number of enrolled credits determines fees (not full- or part-time status) students who enroll in four or fewer credits are charged a smaller enrollment fee than those who enroll for five or more credits. Students enrolled in four or fewer credits are required to pay an additional fee if they want unlimited use of the recreation center; otherwise, their visits are limited to a maximum of 10.

Registering for courses which are full:

The School Director and the MSW Program Director are the only people who can approve a temporary increase in the number of students enrolled in a course section. No section will be over-enrolled as long as another section of the same course has seats available, nor will the capacity of a course be increased by more than 20% of the stated course cap without the consent of the instructor. Student requests for registration in a course that is at its capacity should be directed to the MSW Program Director in writing along with proper justification. (Clarification should be added here about students being guaranteed a place in core courses. Sometimes there are not enough sections on the schedule and students just assume they cannot take a course on their program plan bc sections are full. It should be clear what students need to do.)

Financial Aid Resources at the School of Social Work:

- **Graduate Assistantships**

The School of Social Work employs graduate assistants to facilitate its program objectives and the professional or teaching objectives of its faculty members. Students receiving graduate assistantships 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 job postings are available here:

<https://wmich.edu/career>.

The number of assistants hired in the School of Social Work varies by year based on available funding and department or faculty projects. Students with evidence of professional academic interest and ability for meeting specific programmatic needs receive priority consideration for appointments as graduate assistants. Scholastic merit and/or financial need can be considered but are secondary to school and faculty priorities. For more information about social work assistantship opportunities, please contact the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach (369-387-3200).

- **Veterans Administration Traineeship**

The Veterans Administration Traineeship is available to concentration year students only. Traineeship awards are based on the applicant's potential for professional work in a clinical setting. Priority is given to those interested in employment at the V.A. following completion of training. Apply to the Veterans Administration Hospital after consultation with the director 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](#), (269) 387-6000 and online.

Graduate Program Advising:

Advising is an important aspect of the educational experience. The goals of advising are to assist with matriculation, adhere to university policy, and facilitate social work students as they negotiate the educational process.

Advising is a collective enterprise that requires active participation and frequent communication on the part of every member of the school's community. Students are assigned to advisors after they have been admitted to the school. The first advising meeting is crucial as it explains program requirements and curricular matters such as transfer of credit(s), field instruction, and professional issues. For continuity, students have the same advisor for the entirety of their programs.

Advisors are available during office hours and by appointment. Some faculty members do not work during the summer sessions. If your advisor is not under contract during the summer and you are in need of assistance, please contact the MSW Program Director or the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach to connect with another advisor during the summer sessions.

Advisors familiarize themselves with the special circumstances and individual concerns of each advisee. 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 and the student to communicate whenever there is a difficulty. If necessary, the student and advisor will participate in the Professional Review Committee process. More information about the **Professional Review Committee process** is in the [common student handbook](#).

Advising: Student Responsibilities

The student is responsible for:

1. Being knowledgeable about all degree requirements as specified in the [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 advising process,
3. Managing their academic program as designed with the assistance of the advisor. This

includes enrolling in courses in the sequence specified in the program plan using the university registration process (doing this during advance registration is strongly encouraged),

4. Discussing with their advisor any changes that would affect 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* in a timely fashion if needed,
8. Obtaining the necessary transcripts when requesting transfer of credits,
9. Requesting a change of program when changes are needed,
10. Requesting any exceptions to degree requirements,
11. Applying for graduation by the deadline,
12. Keeping the Manager of Recruitment and Outreach informed of changes of residence and/or employment after graduation.

Advising: Advisor Responsibilities

The advisor is responsible for:

1. Being knowledgeable about degree requirements,
2. Assisting the student in developing their official program plan of study,
3. Submitting the appropriate forms to the appropriate office(s) (e.g. the transfer of credit form, program plan, change of program form, etc. etc.),
4. Assisting with submitting requests for exceptions to degree requirements to the Curriculum Committee and/or the Graduate College,
5. Approving the student's official program plan of study,
6. Counseling a student who wishes to withdraw from the school and recording this information in the student's file.

Students may request a change of advisor by contacting the MSW program director. The program director will make an honest effort to honor requests for a new advisor; however, the school does not guarantee a new advisor. Feedback about an advisor can be provided using the [online form](#).

Advanced Competency Compendium:

The Advanced Competency Compendium is a collection of completed work from concentration courses that demonstrate a student's proficiency in the nine CSWE-required competencies. Digital copies of each ACC-associated assignment must be stored in the eLearning 'course' specifically provided for ACC materials (MSW – Assessment and Advising). The ACC is submitted at the end of a student's course of study as part of the advanced practice course (SWRK 6910, SWRK 6920, SWRK 6960, or SWRK 6980 for Clinical concentration; or SWRK 6700 for the PP&A concentration). Students in their concentration year are provided instructions for compiling this collection, completing the cover sheet, and a description of how it will be graded. ACC data is used in aggregate as part of the school's report to the Council on Social Work Education, its accrediting body. Instructions for the ACC are [here](#).