Master of Social Work, M.S.W.

The M.S.W. program prepares social workers for leadership in the profession and for advanced social work practice in a wide range of settings. The program’s general focus is on family systems and social change, both domestic and international. Primary program goals are met through a set of professional foundation requirements and advanced courses which enable students to understand the dynamics of human development and change; to understand the links between society’s structures and families; to acquire skills for working with individuals, families, small groups, and communities; and to learn how to enhance the responsiveness of human service organizations.

The program has been continually accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1951. See the CSWE Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes for the M.S.W. program.

Explore how social workers help individuals, groups, and families across their lifespans at the National Association of Social Workers website.

Master in Social Work Program Options

Three options are available to complete the M.S.W. in Iowa City and Des Moines, Iowa, depending upon an applicant’s prior preparation. Applicants to the three-year programs in the Quad Cities (located in the Davenport/Bettendorf area on Iowa’s eastern border) or in Sioux City, Iowa, may choose from the first two options. Applicants to any of the options, at any of the centers, complete the same application.

60 s.h. option (regular standing): Designed for individuals who have completed a degree in a discipline other than a CSWE-accredited social work degree program. Applicants apply for fall admission; the deadline is February 1.

48 s.h. option (advanced standing): Designed for individuals who have completed the B.A. in social work or the B.S.W. from a CSWE-accredited social work degree program. Applicants apply for fall admission; the deadline is February 1.

41 s.h. option (accelerated advanced standing): Designed for individuals who have completed the B.A. in social work or the B.S.W. from a CSWE-accredited social work degree program and who meet additional criteria. Additional forms and written requirements are part of the application. Applicants apply for summer admission; the deadline is January 4.

Requirements

The Master of Social Work requires 60 s.h. of graduate credit; the requirement is 48 s.h. for students who hold an undergraduate degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Students who have earned an undergraduate degree in social work from a program accredited by the CSWE and who meet other entrance criteria, can satisfy M.S.W. requirements with a 41 s.h. option. For further details, contact the School of Social Work.

The degree is offered with or without thesis. While students are not required to declare a field of practice, opportunities to specialize are available in fields such as aging, end-of-life care, school social work, child-welfare, trauma informed practice, social work in health and mental health settings, and many others.

The goals of the M.S.W. program are to:

- prepare students to shape the profession's future by providing education in family-based, community-based, and culturally competent practice approaches using the person-in-environment framework; and
- prepare competent professionals for autonomous practice and leadership within the professional community; autonomous practice and leadership include advanced interventions at multiple system levels, supervision, program development, program administration, training, evaluation of practice, dissemination of new models of practice, and policy development.

The school offers the M.S.W. program on the University’s Iowa City campus and at three off-campus sites: Des Moines and Sioux City, Iowa, and the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois (see “M.S.W. Off Campus” below). Each site provides the required structured sequence of courses and includes opportunities for students to individualize their plans of study. All sites give students access to the resources of a very high research activity university (R1/VH Research University).

Requirements for the M.S.W. include 27 s.h. in foundation-level courses and 33 s.h. in advanced courses. All students must earn a minimum of 36 s.h. after admission to the M.S.W. program. Credit toward the M.S.W. may be applied from previous graduate course work if specific criteria are met.

All M.S.W. students follow a structured sequence of courses. They must obtain permission to revise their plan, and they must complete the degree within a maximum of four years. Students must maintain a cumulative g.p.a. of at least 3.00 and they must be in compliance with the school's student advancement policy.

The full-time M.S.W. program is completed in five semesters, beginning in fall and including a summer session. Full-time students complete the degree in the spring semester of their second year. Students whose degree requirement is 48 s.h. may enroll full-time or part-time their first year, following the sequenced plan.

Full-time study and a four-year part-time program are available in Iowa City and Des Moines. A three-year sequence of courses is available at all sites, although the Sioux City and Quad Cities sites admit new entering classes only on a three-year cycle.

Following is an outline of the full-time 60 s.h. program. For information about the three-year and four-year part-time sequences, contact the School of Social Work.

First-Year: Foundation

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Concentrations

In the advanced year of the master's program, students choose one of two concentrations: family-centered practice or integrated practice. These advanced specialized curricula build on the school's liberal arts perspective and on the professional foundation. Both are based on a comprehensive eco-systemic theoretical perspective, and both apply the principles that are part of the school's mission statement, with a focus on culturally competent family-centered and community-based approaches.

Family-Centered Practice

The family-centered practice concentration teaches knowledge and skills necessary for advanced social work practice with individuals and families. These include clinical practice methods that mobilize and develop clients' coping skills, empowering them to manage difficult situations, and culturally sensitive methods for collaborating with clients, their families, and other professionals in planning interventions. Students also learn about advocating for clients, facilitating client self-advocacy, coordinating services to meet multiple needs, and influencing social policy on behalf of clients.

The concentration prepares students to work with individuals and families at appropriate levels of intensity, mobilize existing strengths, and enhance coping skills. Using principles of family-centered practice, students learn to take community and larger systems into account while working in partnership with individuals and families in all aspects of assessment and intervention planning. The concentration emphasizes sensitivity to a variety of family forms and to cultural diversity within family forms. “Family” is broadly defined to include step families, single-parent families, same-sex-couple families, grandparent-as-parent families, adult parent-adult child families, and traditional forms of families.

Integrated Practice

The integrated practice concentration teaches methods of advanced practice that empower organizational and community change at multiple system levels. Students learn skills for assessment, planning, and direct intervention in larger systems such as neighborhoods, social support networks, and service delivery systems, and for policy making. They develop skills for a broad range of interventions, including direct practice, case management, community education, community development and practice, management and administration, organizational and interorganizational planning and program development, team building, organization and program evaluation, and social policy advocacy. They also learn culturally sensitive methods to collaborate with families and communities; identify strengths, assets, and challenges; and develop services and programs that will meet clients' needs.

Building on strengths and assets of organizations and communities, students learn how to mobilize community members in advocacy and change efforts—skills useful for case managers, service coordinators, supervisors, program planners and developers, and administrators. Students also learn how to apply advanced skills to advocacy, community assessment, planning and mobilizing resources, and influencing social policy.
The concentration prepares students for practice in varied settings, including hospitals and community health programs, schools, mental health centers, neighborhood and family resource centers, community- and family-based community service agencies, correctional facilities, and programs that serve the elderly, both in the community and in care facilities. In many of these settings, social workers work as interdisciplinary team members and team leaders within organizations. They also collaborate with community organizations, community residents, and service providers. Many social workers are involved in staff supervision, program development, and agency administration. Content areas include grant writing; intervention in multiple systems, including team and network building; policy practice; and design of evaluation methods for client assessment and program evaluation.

**M.S.W. Off Campus**

The School of Social Work delivers the M.S.W. curriculum to three off-campus sites: Des Moines and Sioux City, Iowa, and the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois. Each site is administered by the School of Social Work in cooperation with the Division of Continuing Education. Social work faculty members teach required courses at each center and are available for student advising. The off-campus programs have been evaluated by the Council on Social Work Education and the University of Iowa Graduate Council as providing a program comparable to that available on the Iowa City campus.

Courses at each off-campus site are taught in classrooms by tenure-track, clinical, visiting, and adjunct faculty members. Instructional connections between sites are maintained through varied technologies, including computer-based instruction.

For program entry and application dates, contact the School of Social Work.

**Des Moines Center**

Located in Des Moines, in central Iowa, this center offers courses sequenced to accommodate both part-time and full-time study. Students may complete the entire degree program at the Des Moines center, although they may choose to travel to Iowa City for selected elective courses offered during the summer.

**Quad Cities Center**

Students in the Quad Cities part-time program can complete their degree entirely off campus and online with the exception of some electives, which they can take during summer sessions in Iowa City. The School offers this part-time program to a cohort admitted once every three years. In addition to the part-time cohort students, there are some full- or part-time students from Iowa City in practicum in the Quad Cities. The Quad Cities program is located in the Davenport/Bettendorf area on Iowa's eastern border.

**Sioux City Center**

The Sioux City part-time program is nearly identical to the Quad Cities part-time program. Most courses are offered in classroom space at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa.

**Joint M.S.W./Ph.D.**

The school offers a joint Master of Social Work/Doctor of Philosophy in social work for students who have completed course work in research and statistics and have postbaccalaureate experience related to social work practice. The joint program permits students to apply a limited amount of credit toward both graduate degrees, reducing the time required to graduate. Individuals interested in the joint program must apply to the M.S.W. program and the Ph.D. program; applications are reviewed by the admissions panels of both programs. For more information, contact the School of Social Work.

**Joint M.S.W./Degrees in Other Disciplines**

The School of Social Work collaborates with the College of Law to offer the joint Juris Doctor/Master of Social Work. It also collaborates with the School of Urban and Regional Planning to offer the joint Master of Social Work/Master of Arts or Master of Science in urban and regional planning, and with the Tippie College of Business to offer the Master of Business Administration/Master of Social Work. Each program permits students to apply up to 12 s.h. of graduate credit toward both degrees, reduced by the time required to graduate. Applicants must apply to each program separately and be admitted to each one before they may be admitted to the joint degree program. For information about the law and planning programs, see Juris Doctor (College of Law) and Urban and Regional Planning (Graduate College) in the Catalog. For information regarding the M.B.A., see M.B.A. Professional Program (Tippie College of Business) in the Catalog.

**M.S.W. Professional Association**

Students and graduates of the social work program are eligible for membership in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW); the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with 132,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies. The NASW Code of Ethics is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers.

Graduates of accredited M.S.W. programs may be eligible for membership in many specialized areas of practice, for example, associate membership in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) upon fulfilling certain curriculum requirements at the graduate level. Courses are not automatically accepted; graduates need to demonstrate that specific courses meet the AAMFT’s requirements, usually by sending course outlines.

**Admission**

The School of Social Work seeks to maintain a heterogeneous student body by enrolling students who represent diverse backgrounds and cultural perspectives. Previous experience in human services and cross-cultural experiences is desirable. The school does not grant academic credit for life experience or previous work experience.

Admission to the M.S.W. 60 s.h. program requires a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, with a reasonable distribution of courses in the liberal arts and sciences (the humanities and the social, behavioral, and biological sciences). Admission to the M.S.W. 48 s.h. program requires a bachelor's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited college or university. Applicants must have an undergraduate g.p.a. of 3.00 or higher, or a g.p.a. of 3.00 or higher on 12 s.h. of letter-graded graduate course work; consult the University's Office of Admissions for
help in calculating grade-point average. Competence on personal computers and spreadsheet applications is required.

Admission to the 41 s.h. program requires a bachelor's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program, earned within the previous five years, with a cumulative g.p.a. of at least 3.20 and a major g.p.a. of at least 3.50.

Applicants whose first language is not English must score at least 100 (Internet-based) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

Applicants must submit three letters of recommendation, including one regarding academic abilities and one from the applicant's most recent employer (if the employment was social work-related); and a personal statement addressing criteria specified by the School of Social Work. Applicants to the 41 s.h. program must provide additional materials.

Applications for the 48 s.h. and 60 s.h. programs are accepted beginning September 1 and must be completed by February 1 to be considered for the next academic year. Applications for the 41 s.h. program are due January 4.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations of the Graduate College.

For a complete statement of graduate admission policies, contact the School of Social Work.

### Financial Support

Students seeking financial assistance should apply for aid through the University of Iowa Office of Student Financial Aid. Students may apply for a limited number of research and teaching assistantships available from the School of Social Work. Application materials for research or teaching assistantships are available from the school each spring, or as positions become available. Aid received through the Office of Student Financial Aid does not preclude students from consideration for aid through the School of Social Work.

### Career Advancement

Professional social workers are found in every facet of community life—in schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, senior centers, elected office, private practices, prisons, military, corporations, and in numerous public and private agencies that serve individuals and families in need. Many also serve as social and community service directors.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), professional social workers are the nation's largest group of mental health services providers. There are more clinically trained social workers—over 200,000—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined. Federal law and the National Institutes of Health recognize social work as one of five core mental health professions.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs employs more than 10,000 professional social workers. It is one of the largest employers of M.S.W. individuals in the United States. More than 40 percent of all disaster mental health volunteers trained by the American Red Cross are professional social workers. There are hundreds of social workers in national, state and local elected office.

Today, almost 50 special interest organizations contribute to the vitality and influence of the social work profession. There are social work groups for educators and researchers, as well as organizations for practitioners in health care leadership, nephrology, oncology, child welfare, schools, prisons, courts, and many other settings.