

Master of Social Work, MSW

The Master of Social Work (MSW) program prepares social workers for advanced social work practice and leadership in a wide range of settings. All students develop skills to work with individuals, families, and communities and to advocate for social change. Students select one of two specializations, clinical practice and leadership practice. The clinical specialization teaches students knowledge and skills to work with children, adults, older adults, families, and small groups in clinical settings. The leadership specialization teaches students knowledge and skills for working with communities through relationship building, policy advocacy, and program and organizational development. Students develop competencies to advance the field of social work, create lasting change, and launch impactful careers helping others and improving lives.

The program has been continually accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 1951. See the CSWE Assessment of Learning Outcomes for the MSW program on the School of Social Work website.

Master in Social Work Program Options

Options are available to complete the MSW full-time or part-time in Iowa City, Des Moines, and online, with applications reviewed annually. The Sioux City program is a three-year, part-time program to which students are admitted every three years. Applicants to any of the options, at any of the centers, complete the same application.

Regular Standing (54 s.h. Option)

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.

Advanced Standing (36 s.h. Option)

Designed for individuals who have completed the BA in social work or the BSW from a CSWE-accredited social work degree program. Applicants apply for summer admission.

Learning Outcomes

The School of Social Work learning outcomes are expressed as enduring understandings—concepts that have lasting value beyond the classroom and apply to every aspect of social work practice.

- Commitment to advance social justice and fight discrimination and inequity.
- Adherence to a high standard of ethics.
- Using a systemic perspective, understanding the interconnectedness of people and their environments, and the systems in which we operate.
- Critical thinking, where problem-solving, creativity, and innovation are as important as learning facts.
- Self-awareness and effective use of self are crucial to effective relationships at all levels of practice.

Competencies

The curriculum is designed to address the following nine CSWE competencies for both generalist and specialized practitioners:

- demonstrate ethical and professional behavior;
- advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice;
- engage in anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) in practice;
- engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice;
- engage in policy practice;
- engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities; and
- evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

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.

Requirements

The Master of Social Work requires 36 s.h. for advanced standing students—those who hold an undergraduate degree in social work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)—or 54 s.h. for students who earned a bachelor's degree in a major other than a CSWE-accredited social work program. Students must maintain a graduate grade-point average of at least 3.00 and they must be in compliance with the school's student advancement policy. The degree is offered with or without a thesis.

Credit from previous graduate coursework toward the MSW may be applied if specific criteria are met, but students must earn a minimum of 36 s.h. after admission to the MSW program and agree to meet all requirements of the program.

All students complete one of two specializations (23 s.h.) and 9 s.h. in elective courses.

54 s.h. Program

Requirements	Hours
Generalist Practice	22
Specialization	23
Electives	9

Generalist Practice

Course #	Title	Hours
All of these:		
SSW:6100	Thinking Like a Social Worker	3

SSW:6200	Development of Professional Use of Self	3
SSW:6300	Theory and Skills for Working With Individuals and Families	3
SSW:6400	Theory and Skills for Working With Organizations and Communities	3
SSW:6500	Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I	3
SSW:6600	Engaging With Evidence	3
SSW:6700	Generalist Practicum in Social Work	3
SSW:6701	Generalist Practice Seminar	1

36 s.h. Program

Requirements	Hours
Advanced Standing Courses	4
Specialization	23
Electives	9

Advanced Standing Courses

Course #	Title	Hours
Both of these:		
SSW:7100	Critical Thinking for Clinical Practice	2
SSW:7200	Critical Thinking for Leadership Practice	2

Specializations

The specific mission of the Master of Social Work (MSW) program is to prepare social workers for leadership in the profession and for advanced social work practice in one of two specializations: clinical practice or leadership practice. While students are not required to declare a more specific focus, opportunities to specialize are available in areas of practice 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. Students in both the generalist and advanced standing programs select one of the following specializations to complete.

Clinical Practice

The clinical practice specialization will prepare students for mental health work with individuals and families in organizations such as nonprofits, hospitals, schools, hospice/end-of-life, and private practice.

Course #	Title	Hours
All of these:		
SSW:7310	Clinical Practice I: Treatment Planning and Intervention	3
SSW:7320	Clinical Practice II: Intervention, Evaluation, Termination	3
SSW:7330	Clinical Practice III: Selected Topics in Clinical Practice	3
SSW:7500	Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice II	3
SSW:7550	Program and Practice Evaluation	3
SSW:7601	Clinical Practicum Seminar I	1

SSW:7602	Clinical Practicum Seminar II	1
One of these:		
SSW:7600	Practicum With Clinical Specialization (taken twice for 3 s.h. each)	6
SSW:7760	Practicum in School Social Work (taken twice for 3 s.h. each)	6

Leadership Practice

The leadership practice specialization will prepare students to partner with communities, develop programs, lead organizations, develop and interpret policy, and advocate for social, economic, and racial justice.

Course #	Title	Hours
All of these:		
SSW:7410	Leadership Practice I: Community Relationship Building and Collaboration	3
SSW:7420	Leadership Practice II: Policy Analysis and Advocacy	3
SSW:7430	Leadership Practice III: Leading Programs and Organizations	3
SSW:7500	Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice II	3
SSW:7550	Program and Practice Evaluation	3
SSW:7751	Leadership Practicum Seminar I	1
SSW:7752	Leadership Practicum Seminar II	1
One of these:		
SSW:7750	Practicum With Leadership Specialization (taken twice for 3 s.h. each)	6
SSW:7760	Practicum in School Social Work (taken twice for 3 s.h. each)	6

Electives

Students in both the regular and advanced standing programs complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Electives are chosen in consultation with their advisors; options include: social work courses (prefix SSW) and aging and longevity studies courses (prefix ASP) numbered 3000 and above (excluding courses already listed), Seminar: Experimental Approaches in Counseling Research (PSQF:7354, arr. s.h.), or courses in the following list.

Course #	Title	Hours
EDTL:4137	Introduction to Educating Advanced Learners	3
EDTL:4900	Foundations of Special Education	3
EDTL:4940	Characteristics of Disabilities	3
EDTL:4950	Behavioral and Social Interventions	3
EDTL:4990	Interdisciplinary Issues in Disabilities	1-3
EDTL:7040	Advanced Topics in Teaching and Learning	arr.

EPLS:3000	Foundations of Education	3
EPLS:5130	Sociology of Education	3
EPLS:6201	Foundations of School Administration	3
EPLS:6236	Special Education Administration	3
PSQF:4133	The Adolescent and Young Adult	3
PSQF:4136	Home/School/Community Partnerships	3
PSQF:4143	Introduction to Statistical Methods	3
PSQF:6200	Educational Psychology	3
PSQF:6206	Advanced Child Development	3
PSQF:6215	Online Instruction: Design and Facilitation	3
PSQF:7385	Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	3

With an advisor's permission, additional elective options are possible. Students completing a thesis are permitted to apply a maximum of 6 s.h. of SSW:7272 Thesis toward their elective requirements.

MSW Off-Campus Learning Centers

Full-time and part-time study are available in Iowa City, Des Moines, and online. Students follow a sequenced plan for their program option which may include electives in the summer. The Sioux City site only admits entering classes on a three-year cycle, beginning in the summer. Advanced standing students begin their coursework in the summer and may complete the program over one year (three semesters) or two years, following the sequenced plan.

The School of Social Work delivers the MSW curriculum in person in Iowa City and in two learning centers in Des Moines and Sioux City, Iowa, and as an online program. Each learning center is administered by the School of Social Work in cooperation with Distance and Online 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 College 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, lecturers, visiting, and adjunct faculty members. Instructional connections between sites are maintained through varied technologies, including computer-based instruction.

Des Moines

The MSW program in Des Moines, in central Iowa, offers courses sequenced to accommodate both part-time and full-time study. Students complete most of their required courses in person at the Des Moines center and most of their electives online. Classes are held at the John and Mary Pappajohn Education Center.

Sioux City

The Sioux City part-time program is offered in classroom space at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, with additional online asynchronous components.

Online

Students in this program attend evening classes in real time using video conferencing, and asynchronous classes in which coursework is done independently, adhering to deadlines.

Combined Programs

Social Work Degree Programs

MSW/PhD in Social Work

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

Degree Programs With Other Colleges

The School of Social Work collaborates with other colleges to offer combined degree programs. Each program permits students to apply up to 12 s.h. of graduate credit toward both degrees, reducing 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 combined degree program. Information about the combined programs is available from the School of Social Work's program and admissions manager.

MSW/MBA

The School of Social Work and the Tippie College of Business offer the combined Master of Social Work/Master of Business Administration programs. For more information, see the MBA (Tippie College of Business) in the catalog.

MSW/MS in Urban and Regional Planning

The School of Social Work along with the School of Planning and Public Affairs offer the combined Master of Social Work/Master of Science in urban and regional planning. For more information, see the MS in urban and regional planning (Graduate College) in the catalog.

Admission

Admission to the 54 s.h. program requires a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited American college or university, or an equivalent degree from another country as determined by Admissions with a reasonable distribution of courses in the liberal arts and sciences (the humanities and the social, behavioral, and biological sciences).

Admission to the 36 s.h. program requires a bachelor's degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)-accredited college or university.

All applicants must have an undergraduate grade-point average (GPA) of 3.00 or higher, or a GPA of 3.00 or higher on 12 s.h. of letter-graded graduate coursework; consult Admissions for assistance in calculating GPA. Competence in personal computers and spreadsheet applications is required. While experience in volunteering, working, and life are valued, the CSWE does not permit the School of Social Work to grant academic credit for life experience or previous volunteer or work experience.

Applicants must submit:

- the University of Iowa graduate admissions application;
- a 2-page statement of purpose (advanced standing applicants have an additional question);
- a brief School of Social Work supplemental data form;
- a résumé;
- the name, email address, and phone number for two references (one academic and one professional reference); and
- unofficial transcripts from all colleges attended (except the University of Iowa).

Applications for the 54 s.h. program are accepted beginning Sept. 1 and must be completed by Feb. 1 to be considered for the next academic year. Applications for the 36 s.h. program are due Dec. 1 for the one-year program and Feb. 1 for the 2-year program.

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

For a complete list of graduate admission policies, see the School of Social Work.

Career Advancement

Professional social workers are found in every facet of community life—in schools, health settings (such as hospitals, hospice, skilled care facilities, substance abuse treatment, 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 MSW individuals in the United States. More than 40% 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 offices.

Projected growth in social work jobs is estimated to be greater than average for all occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

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.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

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54 s.h. Program

This sample plan is currently being reviewed and will be added at a later date.