Master of Social Work, M.S.W.

The Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) program prepares social workers for leadership in the profession and for advanced social work practice in a wide range of settings. Students choose from two advanced concentrations, both of which allow students to develop advanced skills to work with families and communities and advocate for social change. The two concentrations of the program, currently family-centered practice and integrated practice, teach students knowledge and skills to work with children, adults, older adults, families, small groups, organizations and communities. The program provides students the opportunity to develop the competencies necessary for leadership in addressing the unique challenges of the state of Iowa, including a large proportion of older adults, recent immigrants to rural communities, and rural poverty.

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 M.S.W. program on the School of Social Work website.

Master in Social Work Program Options

Options are available to complete the M.S.W. full time or part time in Iowa City and Des Moines, with applications reviewed annually. The Quad Cities program (located in the Davenport/ Bettendorf area on Iowa's eastern border) and the Sioux City program are three-year, part-time programs to which students are admitted every three years. The hybrid (online) option is also a three-year cohort model, with applications reviewed every two years. Applicants to any of the options, at any of the centers, complete the same application, with one additional essay required of the online applicants.

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; the deadline is February 1.

Advanced Standing (36 s.h. Option)

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 summer admission; the deadline is December 1.

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.

Learning Outcomes

Enduring Understandings

The School of Social Work learning goals are expressed as enduring understandings—concepts that have lasting value beyond the classroom and are applicable 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 of facts.
- Self-awareness and effective use of self are crucial to effective relationships at all levels of practice.

M.S.W. Goals

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, including 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 curriculum is designed to address the following nine competencies for both generalist and advanced practitioners:

- demonstrate ethical and professional behavior;
- engage diversity and difference in practice;
- advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice;
- 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.

Explore how social workers help individuals, groups, and families across their lifespans on the NASW website.

Requirements

The Master of Social Work requires 54 s.h. of graduate credit or 36 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 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 degree is offered with or without thesis.

The M.S.W. curriculum is under revision with the generalist courses launched in 2022 and the specialized advanced courses to be launched in 2023.

All M.S.W. students follow a structured sequence of courses and must obtain permission to revise their plan.

Requirements for the 54 s.h. M.S.W. program include 22 s.h. in foundation-level courses, 23 s.h. in advanced courses, and a minimum of 9 s.h. in electives. Students complete one semester of generalist practicum and two semesters of advanced practicum. Credit from previous graduate coursework toward the M.S.W. may be applied if specific criteria are met, but students must earn a minimum of 36 s.h. after admission to the M.S.W. program. Full-time programs begin in the fall semester and include a summer session in which electives are offered.

Effective 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 specific mission of the M.S.W. program is to prepare social workers for leadership in the profession and for advanced social work practice in one of two concentrations. Both concentrations allow students to develop advanced skills to work with families and communities and advocate for social change. The two concentrations of the program, family-centered practice and integrated practice, teach students knowledge and skills to work with children, adults, older adults, families, small groups, organizations, and communities.

The M.S.W. program helps students develop high levels of skill in applying the values and ethics of the social work profession to complex ethical issues. The program has a strong liberal arts focus, and the research mission of the University ensures students learn about faculty research; critical thinking; analytic and scientific ways of thinking; social, economic, and environmental justice; and practice and program evaluation. 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 school offers the M.S.W. program on the University’s Iowa City campus and at four learning centers: Des Moines, Sioux City, the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois (see "M.S.W. Off-Campus Learning Centers" below), and as a hybrid (online) program. Each learning center 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).

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 only admit entering classes on a three-year cycle. The hybrid program admits students every other year and is a three-year program.

Following are course sequences for full- and part-time 54 s.h. programs, and full- and part-time 36 s.h. programs. For more information on the family-centered practice or integrated practice concentration areas a student can choose as part of each degree program, see "Concentrations" below.

- Two-Year (54 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program [p. 2]
- Three-Year (54 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program in Iowa City and Des Moines Centers [p. 2]
- Four-Year (54 Semester Hour) Part-Time Program [p. 3]
- One-Year (36 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program [p. 3]
- Two-Year (36 Semester Hour) Part-Time Program [p. 3]

**Two-Year (54 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program**

This program is for students who earned a bachelor's degree in a major other than a CSWE-accredited social work program.

**First Year: Generalist Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6100</td>
<td>Thinking Like a Social Worker</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6200</td>
<td>Development of Professional Use of Self</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6300</td>
<td>Theory and Skills for Working with Individuals and Families</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6400</td>
<td>Theory and Skills for Working with Organizations and Communities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6500</td>
<td>Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6600</td>
<td>Engaging with Evidence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6700</td>
<td>Generalist Practicum in Social Work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6701</td>
<td>Generalist Practice Seminar</td>
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**Second Year: Concentration**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinical social work practice or leadership practice courses (consult advisor)</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicum course (600 hours; consult advisor)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicum seminar (consult advisor)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program/practice evaluation course (consult advisor)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social, economic, and environmental justice II course (consult advisor)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Electives**

Students complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Students receive a tentative plan to complete the program and meet regularly with their faculty advisor about their plan.

**Three-Year (54 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program in Iowa City and Des Moines Centers**

This program is for students who earned a bachelor's degree in a major other than a CSWE-accredited social work program. Contact the School of Social Work for information about the three-year, part-time program offered online in Sioux City and the Quad Cities.
## First Year

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6200</td>
<td>Development of Professional Use of Self</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6300</td>
<td>Theory and Skills for Working with Individuals and Families</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6500</td>
<td>Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6600</td>
<td>Engaging with Evidence</td>
<td>3</td>
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## Second Year

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<tr>
<td>SSW:6400</td>
<td>Theory and Skills for Working with Organizations and Communities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6500</td>
<td>Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6600</td>
<td>Engaging with Evidence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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</table>

## Third Year

- Clinical social work practice or leadership practice courses (consult advisor)
  - Hours: 9
- Social, economic, and environmental justice II course (consult advisor)
  - Hours: 3

## Electives

Students complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Students receive a tentative plan to complete the program and meet regularly with their faculty advisor about their plan.

## Four-Year (54 Semester Hour) Part-Time Program

This program is for part-time students who earned a bachelor's degree in a major other than a CSWE-accredited social work degree program.

### First Year

<table>
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<td>Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSW:6600</td>
<td>Engaging with Evidence</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Second Year

- Theory and Skills for Working with Individuals and Families
  - Hours: 3
- Theory and Skills for Working with Organizations and Communities
  - Hours: 3
- Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice I
  - Hours: 3

## Third Year

- Generalist Practicum in Social Work
  - Hours: 3
- Generalist Practice Seminar
  - Hours: 1
- Program/practice evaluation course (consult advisor)
  - Hours: 3
- Social, economic, and environmental justice II course (consult advisor)
  - Hours: 3

## Electives

Students complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Students receive a tentative plan to complete the program and meet regularly with their faculty advisor about their plan.

## One-Year (36 Semester Hour) Full-Time Program

This program is for students who earned a B.A. degree in a major in social work.

### First Year

Students take a minimum of 4 s.h. in required coursework. In the fall they complete 9 s.h. of required courses and 4 s.h. of practicum and seminar. In the spring, they complete an additional 6 s.h. of required coursework and 4 s.h. of practicum and seminar.

### Electives

Students complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Students receive a tentative plan to complete the program and meet regularly with their faculty advisor about their plan.

## Two-Year (36 Semester Hour) Part-Time Program

This program is for students who earned a B.A. degree with a major in social work.

### First Year

Beginning in the summer, students take a minimum of 4 s.h. in required coursework. They take 6 s.h. in the fall and 6 s.h. in the spring of required coursework.
Second Year
Students take an advanced practicum (3 s.h.) and a seminar (1 s.h.) each semester. They also take a required program/practice evaluation course in the fall.

Electives
Students complete 9 s.h. in elective coursework. Students receive a tentative plan to complete the program and meet regularly with their faculty advisor about their plan.

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 older adults, 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 Learning Centers
The School of Social Work delivers the M.S.W. curriculum to four learning centers: in Des Moines and Sioux City, Iowa; the Quad Cities area of Iowa and Illinois; and as a hybrid (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.

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

Des Moines
The M.S.W. program in Des Moines, in central Iowa, 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. Classes are held at the John and Mary Pappajohn Education Center.

Quad Cities
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 of Social Work 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, and courses are offered at Scott Community College.
Sioux City

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.

Hybrid (Online)

The M.S.W. hybrid program is designed for students who live in Iowa or bordering states and who, because of geography or life circumstances, cannot access the Sioux City, Des Moines, Quad Cities, or Iowa City learning centers. 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. A mandatory two- or three-day summer institute is held in Iowa City each August. Courses are scheduled over a three-year period and new applications are accepted every other year.

Combined Programs

Social Work Degree Programs

M.S.W./Ph.D. 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 M.S.W. program and the Ph.D. 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 administrator.

M.S.W./J.D.

The School of Social Work collaborates with the College of Law to offer the combined Master of Social Work/Juris Doctor programs. For information about the J.D., see Juris Doctor, J.D. (College of Law) in the Catalog.

M.S.W./M.B.A. (Professional Program)

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 M.B.A. Professional Program (Tippie College of Business) in the Catalog.

M.S.W./M.S. 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 M.S. in urban and regional planning (Graduate College) in the Catalog.

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. 54 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. 36 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 coursework; consult the University's Office of Admissions for assistance in calculating grade-point average. Competence on personal computers and spreadsheet applications is required.

Applicants whose first language is not English must submit official test scores to verify English proficiency. Applicants can verify English proficiency by submitting official test scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Duolingo English Test (DET).

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.

Applications for the 54 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 36 s.h. program are due December 1.

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, 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, 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 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.

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.