Master of Social Work, MSW

The Master of Social Work (MSW) 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 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 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 Feb. 1.

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; the deadline is Dec. 1.

MSW 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 MSW 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.

MSW Goals

The goals of the MSW 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;
- advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice;
- engage 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.

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