Social Work, PhD

Learning Outcomes

Graduates will:

- locate their work in the intellectual landscape of social work;
- critically analyze theories, practices, policies, and research in at least one specialized area of social work knowledge;
- disseminate knowledge that contributes to the advancement of social work research, practice, and policy, including writing publishable, peer-reviewed manuscripts; presenting at local, national, or international conferences; and/or producing policy briefs or white papers; and
- in the social work classroom, create a learning culture and classroom climate that is inclusive of a diverse population of students and diverse learning styles.

Requirements

The Doctor of Philosophy program in social work requires 78 s.h. of graduate credit. Students must maintain a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.00. Students complete the required coursework, research, and teaching practicum; pass a comprehensive exam; write a dissertation; and defend it in an oral exam. Their work includes courses in one of four outside disciplines—sociology, psychology, public health, or education—to prepare for the comprehensive examination and dissertation.

The doctoral program prepares students to conduct research that contributes to the knowledge base of social work, to become leaders in the profession, and to teach social work in postsecondary educational institutions.

Those who enter the program with an MSW are granted 30 s.h. credit; they must complete an additional 48 s.h. for the degree. Individuals with master’s degrees in related disciplines (for example, psychology or sociology) may choose to earn a PhD in social work without first earning the MSW. Credit from a related master’s degree may be applied to the PhD degree program, as determined by the School of Social Work.

Individualized and Interdisciplinary Curriculum

The program allows students to develop a coherent program of study with opportunities to pursue their own scholarly interests. These interests are pursued through a core social work curriculum, a concentration (sociology, psychology, education, or public health) and a social work focal area (e.g., family violence). Students may take focal area courses in any college or department at the University of Iowa. The median time to complete the degree is four years.

The School of Social Work provides a supportive environment with substantial opportunities for mentoring and interaction with faculty members. Throughout PhD studies at the University of Iowa, the school assists students in developing a program of study based on their unique educational and career goals. There are many opportunities to work closely with faculty members in a mentoring environment. In the first year, students complete a mentored research practicum with a faculty member and a mentored in-class teaching experience. During the second year, students choose a faculty member to guide them through the comprehensive examination and dissertation process.

Admission

To ensure that all doctoral students receive mentoring, the School of Social Work typically admits three or four students annually; approximately 35% of applicants are admitted.

Admission Requirements

Students are required to have a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university, and a minimum undergraduate grade-point average of 3.00 (on a 4.00 scale).

Students should have completed an introductory statistics course (including graphical techniques for presenting data, descriptive statistics, correlation, introduction to regression, prediction, logic of statistical inference, elementary probability models, estimation, and tests of significance) with a grade of B or higher. Research methods courses taken in an MSW program typically do not meet the criteria for an introductory statistics course. Applicants who have not taken an introductory statistics course must complete one before beginning the program.

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 applying only to the PhD program are required to have an MSW or a master’s degree in a related field, such as public policy, public health, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, education, nursing, or anthropology.

Admission and Selection Process

Applications are accepted beginning Sept. 1 for the following academic year; applications are due Feb. 1. Admission decisions are made in February. Applicants are notified, in writing, of the decision by April 1. In some years, there may be a waiting list. If applicants are placed on the waiting list, they are notified of this decision by April 1.

The school evaluates applicants based on their potential to independently conduct and disseminate scholarship that contributes to policy or practice and on their potential to prepare students to educate future social workers.

Financial Support

The School of Social Work provides full-time students with a competitive, multiyear financial package (full tuition, an assistantship, a health and dental insurance allowance). It also provides scholarships, awards, travel awards, and dissertation awards.

In addition to funding provided by the School of Social Work, applicants may be eligible for financial awards through the Graduate College, other departments at the University of Iowa, and organizations outside the university. The director of the PhD program works with students to identify sources of funding.

The Graduate College awards dissertation and research fellowships, summer fellowships, and travel awards. The Graduate College website contains a complete list of awards.
Career Advancement

To learn more about the academic job market, see the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) career center. The CSWE posts jobs year round, although most new ads for teaching and research positions are posted between August and November.

Graduates become leaders in education, research, and government. All of the PhD graduates from the University of Iowa’s School of Social Work program have obtained employment within one year of graduation. Of these, about 75% of graduates obtain teaching or research positions, and about 25% obtain policy, administrative, or practice positions.

To learn more about some of the recent graduates’ careers, visit the School of Social Work website.

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