



**SOCIAL WORK  
BSSW PROGRAM**

**STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**Southwest Minnesota State University  
1501 State Street  
Marshall, Minnesota 56258**

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## Welcome Letter

Dear Student,

Welcome to the Southwest Minnesota State University Social Work Program.

In 1987, the Social Science Department voted to pursue an accredited Social Work program, and in 1990 a formal proposal was submitted to and approved by both the State University Board and the State's Higher Education Coordinating Board for the Social Work major. The late Dr. Eric Markussen began the process of accreditation with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in the fall of 1990. The Social Work program received its first accreditation in 1996 retroactive to 1992. We were successfully reaccredited in 2000, 2008, and 2017.

As a graduate of our accredited Social Work program, you will meet one of the requirements for Social Work licensure, which is required to practice Social Work in most settings in Minnesota and throughout the United States. Our graduates are practicing Social Work throughout the southwest Minnesota region as well as the Upper Midwest and across the country.

The SMSU undergraduate Social Work curriculum provides a professional foundation, building on a liberal arts base and interdisciplinary coursework. The courses offered by Social Work faculty are designed to introduce generalist skills and knowledge for Social Work practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, within a framework of Social Work core values and practice responsibilities. These core values include social justice and client empowerment; generalist practice responsibilities include cultural responsiveness, commitment to professional competence, and the demonstration of practice effectiveness. The required field education component of the program provides opportunities for you to consider a variety of practice settings and personal and professional options regarding specialization. The program also builds a foundation in which students can pursue graduate education and take advantage of utilizing advanced standing as you will graduate from a CSWE accredited bachelor's program.

We have a highly individualized program, and as a result, we get to know students very well and can work with you more effectively to develop the skills and abilities necessary for the beginning Social Work practitioner. We can provide the close contact, individualization, and atmosphere of a small private college program either in the on-campus program or in our fully online program.

This handbook is designed to provide you with all the Social Work program information needed as a Social Work major. We hope that the manual will be of help to you and we welcome your suggestions as to how the handbook could be improved.

Sincerely,

James Smalley, Ph.D., MSW, LISW (MN)  
Associate Professor  
Program Director

## USE OF THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to familiarize students, faculty, and field instructors with a general introduction to the major, curriculum requirements, and the policies and procedures of the Social Work Program, Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, Minnesota. This handbook applies to all students in the social work program, online and on campus.

Many of the questions you will have regarding the Social Work Program can be answered by reading this handbook. The information is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather it should be used as a reference for basic Social Work Program expectations. Refer to the Southwest Minnesota State University Academic Catalog (<http://www.smsu.edu/catalog/>) for information regarding SMSU Liberal Education Program, Minnesota Transfer Curriculum and associated graduation requirements. For further information about university academic information not included in the catalog, services for students, organizations and activities, student rights and responsibilities, student code of conduct, personal safety and security, and university policies and procedures, refer to the SMSU Student Handbook (<http://www.smsu.edu/administration/studenthandbook/>).

**All Social Work majors are expected to familiarize themselves with this handbook and to be responsible for relevant academic requirements, policies, and procedures in the Social Work program.** Any questions or comments you may have can be directed to your academic faculty advisor.

The information in this handbook is as current as of the date of publication; however, information may be subject to change between editions. Any revisions will take priority over this edition's contents and will be given the necessary publicity to acquaint Social Work students. Notices will be posted and distributed as they occur. It is the responsibility of Social Work students to make note of such changes.

## SMSU Land Acknowledgement Statement

Southwest Minnesota State University sits on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people, collectively known as the Oceti Sakowin, Seven Council Fires. We acknowledge and recognize our sovereign neighbors from the Pezihutazizi Otunwe (Yellow Medicine Village) and Cansayapi Otunwe (Village Where They Mark The Trees Red), and all indigenous people who continue to call this area home. SMSU resides on land ceded by the Dakota Nation to the United States in the disputed 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux. This land acknowledgement affirms these nations' sovereignty and history, while seeking to hold SMSU accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous people.

**MISSION STATEMENT,  
GOALS and OBJECTIVES**

## **SMSU SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT**

The Southwest Minnesota State University Social Work Program's educational experience prepares professional liberal arts graduates to uphold social work values and ethics to serve, honor and empower the voices of diverse populations while promoting social, racial, economic and environmental justice in a continually changing world.

The goal of the program is to prepare students to become culturally competent, ethical social work practitioners in a wide range of settings. The social work program is dedicated to work with vulnerable and marginal populations such as women, older adults, and people with disabilities. It affirms the values of human diversity, self-determination, and social justice. To achieve its goals, the social work program integrates a liberal arts foundation with social work values, skills, and knowledge to prepare students for service that is reflective, responsible, informed by scholarly knowledge, and responsive to the communities they serve.

## **SMSU SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

1. To prepare students for generalist practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities of diverse backgrounds;
  - a. Incorporate diversity in practice
  - b. Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment
  - c. Respond to contexts that shape practice
  - d. Engage, assess, intervene, evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
2. To promote an identification with and responsibility to the values and ethics of the Social Work profession;
  - a. Identify with the Social Work profession
  - b. Apply ethical principles in practice
  - c. Advocate for human rights and social and economic justice
3. To prepare students to be lifelong learners in a changing global social and natural environment.
  - a. Apply critical thinking in practice
  - b. Engage in informed research
  - c. Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well being

# **SMSU BSSW PROGRAM**

### **Continuation in the Major**

The Social Work program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education for entry level professional generalist Social Work practice. The major is also excellent preparation for graduate school work in Social Work and related fields.

The social work program encourages students from diverse populations and backgrounds to consider the major upon admission to the university. To be a part of the major before formal application (described in the section below), students must meet academic expectations and consistently demonstrate standards of professional behavior that are assessed regularly by the social work faculty. A statement of expected professional behavior can be found in social work course syllabi and include the following:

1. Punctual attendance and participation in classes;
2. Respectful interactions with faculty and students;
3. Willing to reflect on interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities;
4. Compliance with the Code of Ethics;
5. As much as possible, participation in the Student Social Work Association (SSAW)

Further expectations for professional and academic conduct can be found on the social work website: <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/?id=1815>.

Students who have difficulties meeting these standards will receive a letter from the Program Director outlining specific issues that need to be addressed. Behaviors that would warrant such a review are based on the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), and the Minnesota Social Work Practice Act. Examples of unprofessional or unethical behavior include: impropriety in personal conduct (such as dishonesty or criminal behavior); exploitive relationships (such as sexual relationships or other behaviors pursued for personal advantage, e.g. with practicum clients); and any form of illegal discrimination or discrimination contrary to Southwest Minnesota State University policy.

### **Formal Admission Criteria to the Major**

To be formally accepted as a major in Social Work, a student needs to have completed or be in the process of finishing required course expectations. Students must achieve a grade of C- or better in required courses. These criteria are the same for on campus, online and/or transfer students.

### **Application to the Social Work Major Process**

The Social Work Program selects students for the Social Work major through a competitive formal admissions process. Students apply for admission to the major generally during their third year; applications for admission to the social work major are open during fall and spring semesters. Students **MUST** be current SMSU social work majors to apply to the social work major; students cannot apply before being an enrolled student at SMSU. Submission deadline for all application materials is shared through student's SMSU email and generally scheduled in advance of SMSU's advising/registration dates each semester. The application form can be found on the Social Work Program website:

<http://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/?id=1815>.

After receipt of the application and if determined to be necessary, the student applicant may be scheduled for an interview with the Social Work Program Director and other Social Work faculty



members (see the following selection procedures).

### **Selection Procedures**

The program's criteria for selection and admission are a demonstration of the following:  
Intellectual qualities and academic skills needed for education in Social Work;

1. Intellectual qualities and academic skills needed for education in Social Work;
2. Student's overall writing abilities;
3. Understanding and commitment to the NASW Code of Ethics;
4. Commitment to improving the quality of life for those facing a variety of individual and social problems;
5. Concern for issues of social justice and sensitivity toward groups that have experienced discrimination; and,
6. Capacity for self-awareness and self-evaluation.

Application materials are reviewed by faculty, scored using a rubric and all applicants are reviewed by the program. If materials submitted are insufficient for decision-making, additional information may be requested and an interview scheduled. The focus of the interview is on the applicant's knowledge, skills, and values as they pertain to the Social Work profession and the NASW Code of Ethics. Interviews may be scheduled upon receipt of all the above listed materials.

Decisions regarding admission will be made by the Program Director and the Social Work faculty. Applicants will receive notice regarding the decision within ten (10) business days of the end date of the application deadline. Three decision outcomes are possible:

1. Admitted
2. Admitted on a Probationary Basis
3. Denied Admission

Those admitted on a probationary basis have not met the academic criteria (2.5 cumulative GPA) in all courses that apply towards graduation requirements; and a 2.5 cumulative GPA in all courses required in the Social Work major. However, based on other circumstances presented in the student's application and/or during the personal interview, the program may conditionally accept the student. Progress toward meeting the 2.5 GPA requirement will be monitored each semester by the advisor and the student. Failure to meet the 2.5 GPA requirement after two semesters may invalidate admission for students who have been admitted on a probationary basis.

Those denied admission will be informed in writing of the decision, as well as the reasons for the decision. Students may appeal the decision following the appeal procedures located in this Student Handbook.

### **Process for the evaluation of applications:**

The Social Work Program selects students for the Social Work major through a competitive formal admissions process. Students apply for admission to the major generally during their third year; applications for admission to the social work major are open during fall and spring semesters. Students must be current SMSU social work majors to apply to the social work major; students cannot apply before being an enrolled student at SMSU. Submission deadline

for all application materials is shared through student's SMSU email and scheduled in advance of SMSU's advising/registration dates each semester. After receipt of the application and if determined to be necessary, the student applicant may be scheduled for an interview with the Social Work Program Director and other Social Work faculty members.

The application process for students is:

1. Complete and submit the "Application for Admission to the Social Work Major" form located in the Social Work Program Student Handbook and accessible on the Social Work Program website:  
<https://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/resources-links.html>. This form includes the student's review of her or his "Social Service Work Experience," "Volunteer or Community Experience," and "Family and/or Work Involvement" and the student's initialed agreement to abide by the NASW Code of Ethics.
2. Prepare and submit a typed "Personal Statement," using the Personal Statement instructions located in the Social Work Program Student Handbook and accessible on the Social Work Program website. The personal statement should be a serious reflection on the student's thoughts and feelings about being a social work major.
3. Complete and submit a "Release of Information" form regarding the student's academic performance for the purpose of letters of reference/recommendations. The forms are located on the Social Work Program website.
4. Complete and submit the "Checklist" of the course requirements for admission to the Social Work Major; the form is located on the Social Work Program website.

All application materials are available on the Social Work Program webpage as well as sent to students via their SMSU email.

### **Requirements for Admission to the Social Work Field Practicum**

Students apply for admission to the field practicum during fall, spring or summer semesters while enrolled in SWRK 484, Pre-Field Practicum Seminar. The application materials as well as the Field Manual can be found on the program's website.

(<http://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/?id=8815>)

For admission to SWRK 499 Field Practicum and SWRK 485 Social Work Field Practicum Seminar (for full-time practicum students) or SWRK 497/498 Field Practicum I and II, and SWRK 487/488 Social Work Field Practicum Seminar I and II (for part-time practicum students) a student must have:

1. Completed, completing or has a plan to complete all required courses for the Social Work major during the semester of application for field instruction.
2. A minimum cumulative grade of GPA of 2.5;
3. Earned a grade of C- or better in all Social Work courses required for the major; and,
4. Demonstrated the values and ethics of the profession.
5. Students must have completed SWRK 342: Generalist Social Work Practice I and SWRK 343: Generalist Social Work Practice II BEFORE they can begin their practicum. Students can be in the process of completing SWRK 344: Generalist Social Work Practice III during their practicum.

Admission to field practicum is the decision of the Director of Field Education. A student will not be admitted to SWRK 499 Field Practicum or SWRK 497/498 without meeting the above academic and professional criteria. Students denied admission will be informed in writing of the

decision, and the reason(s) for the decision.

Students who are admitted to Field Practicum complete 440 hours of field practicum in an agency. Students concurrently register for SWRK 485 for full-time practicum students and SWRK 487/488 for part-time practicum students. Generally, full-time practicum students complete about 32 hours per week at their practicum agency and part-time practicum students complete about 15 hours per week at their practicum agency.

Note that students must have completed SWRK 342: Generalist Social Work Practice I and SWRK 343: Generalist Social Work Practice II BEFORE they can begin their practicum. Students can be in the process of completing SWRK 344: Generalist Social Work Practice III during their practicum.

All students will work with the Director of Field Education on a plan to find a practicum placement that will satisfy the needs of the program as well as be an educational learning opportunity for the student. Students **CANNOT** complete their practicum by doing their current job. Students who are interested in completing their practicum at their place of employment (but not their current role) need to work with the Director of Field Education to ensure learning will take place as part of the practicum experience.

## SOCIAL WORK MAJOR COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The Social Work Program's BSSW curriculum is organized around SMSU's Liberal Education Program (LEP), interdisciplinary courses, and professional foundation courses which include content on Social Work values and ethics, diversity, social and economic justice, populations-at-risk, human behavior and the social environment, social welfare policy and services, Social Work practice, research, and field practicum.

### Liberal Education Foundation (MnTC) (22 credits)

ENG 151	Academic Writing	4
ENG 251	Writing in Professions	3
PHIL 103	Ethics	3
POL 220	American National Government	3
PSYC 101	General Psychology	3
SOCI 101	Introduction to Sociology	3
COMM 110	Essentials of Public Presentations	3

### Interdisciplinary Foundation (16 credits)

INDS XXX	any Indigenous Nations and Dakota Studies course (3 credits)	
PSYC 200	Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences	3
PSYC 200L	Stats for the Behavioral Sciences Lab	1
PSYC 235	Abnormal Psychology	3
PSYC 260	Developmental Psychology	3
SOCI 315	Applied Social Research	3

### Professional Social Work Foundation (24 credits)

SWRK 234	Introduction to Social Work & Social Welfare	3
SWRK 330	Basic Interviewing Skills	3
SWRK 340	Human Behavior in the Social Environment	3
SWRK 342	Generalist Social Work Practice I	3
SWRK 343	Generalist Social Work Practice II	3
SWRK 344	Generalist Social Work Practice III	3
SWRK 351	Diverse and At-Risk Populations	3
SWRK 402	Social Welfare Policy	3

*[For Social Work Methods Sequence (SWRK 342, SWRK 343, and SWRK 344) admission to the major is required.]*

### Field Practicum (13 credits)

SWRK 484	Pre-Field Practicum	1
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#### Full-Time Practicum Students

SWRK 485	Social Work Field Seminar	4
SWRK 499	Field Practicum	8

#### Part-Time Practicum Students

SWRK 487	Social Work Field Seminar I	2
SWRK 488	Social Work Field Seminar II	2
SWRK 497	Field Practicum I	4
SWRK 498	Field Practicum II	4

## Transfer Students

Transfer students applying for admission to the SMSU Social Work Program must complete the following process:

1. The Admissions Office makes decisions regarding admission to the University. Transfer credit is evaluated by the Transfer Specialist in the Registration and Records Office. Students will receive confirmations indicating the total number of transfer credits they will be transferring and how these credits will apply to the Liberal Education Program (LEP) and the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC).
2. The Program Director makes any final decisions regarding acceptance of transfer courses in the major.
3. A number of non-social work courses are required for the liberal arts foundation for the major. Courses that are accepted for transfer credit as core or elective courses will generally be granted credit for the social work program; however, the faculty academic advisor reviews the initial decision made by the Registration and Records Office regarding these courses on an individual basis. In some cases, additional information (such as course description, syllabi, texts, etc.) may be required to further assess the course and grant equivalency credit.
4. All social work courses with a grade of C- or better from social work programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education may be applied to the major. Practice courses may be accepted through transfer but are evaluated on an individual basis by the program.
5. Transfer credit is not granted for the Social Work Practicum; the requirements of the practicum experience must be completed through SMSU.
6. Academic credit for life experience and previous work experience will **not be given**, in whole or in part, in lieu of the field practicum or any of the courses required for the major as stipulated by the Council on Social Work Education. The SMSU Social Work Program does not offer Credit by Examination – Departmental Credit by Examination (general examination course equivalencies) for professional foundation courses, Credit for Prior Learning, nor does it accept CLEP subject examinations as substitutions for professional foundation courses. However, students may test-out of some Liberal Arts Program (LAP) courses if the particular academic unit authorizes such examinations. Professional foundation courses and prerequisite courses taken over seven years ago are not generally accepted in transfer to meet Social Work major course requirements but students with this situation should contact their faculty academic advisor.
7. In addition to the above criteria, students transferring credits from international institutions have their courses evaluated by the Registration and Records Office. There are special circumstances that involve international students, who have already completed some courses or a 3-year degree abroad in Social Work (usually around 90 credit hours) but need a 4-year degree for graduate Social Work study in the United States. In such cases, the SMSU Social Work Program strongly advises the student to complete the

International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service (ISWDRES)  
procedures offered via the Council on Social Work Education's website:  
<https://www.cswe.org/accreditation/scopeandservices/international-degree-review/>

# **SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM**

## **ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Student Social Work Association**

The Student Social Work Association (SSWA), or Social Work Club, was established in 1992, and is an organization for all students interested in the field of Social Work. All social work majors, on campus and online, are automatically members of the SSWA. Members are encouraged to be active participants in campus and community activities.

This association offers peer support, community service activities, educational programs, fundraising events, and social activities. Additionally, SSWA members are involved in evaluating course content, teaching, and academic advising. All students are invited to observe and evaluate presentations by potential Social Work faculty. These experiences form a base for entering into the professional field of Social Work.

All are encouraged to join. The SSWA clubroom is located in Charter Hall 110. It is a gathering center for study groups, meetings and making friends. All Social Work students receive invitations to events and meetings throughout the year.

### **Student Advisory Council**

The Social Work Program's Student Advisory Council (SAC) was established in 2001 and is comprised of two students: the President of SSWA and a student elected from the Social Work majors at large. Both members of the SAC are open to any social work major, regardless of academic year, program option, or other standing within the university. SAC members act as formal liaisons between the students and the program faculty. The purpose of the SAC is to provide a formal means for students to participate in formulating and modifying policies affecting academic and student affairs as well as improving the explicit curriculum within the program and advising. The SAC provides planned and ad hoc exchanges between Social Work students and the Social Work Program. While advisory in nature, SAC input is used by the program for purposes of program review and evaluation and the modification of program policy, curriculum, and goals and objectives. The primary concerns and activities of SAC are to:

- Review Social Work Program assessment data;
- Review and make recommendations to the Social Work Program relative to program policy;
- Review and make recommendations to the Social Work Program relative to program curriculum;
- Review and make recommendations to the Social Work Program relative to program goals and objectives;
- Maintain healthy Social Work Student–Faculty relations;
- Identify and make recommendations on University-wide issues that directly affect Social Work students;
- Provide support to SSWA; and
- Identify and make recommendations on other issues and concerns that are deemed appropriate by Social Work students or faculty.

Issues of concern and suggested recommendations may be discussed during SSWA executive or regular membership meetings – in the absence of the Social Work Faculty Advisor. The SAC representatives can, then, bring forth these concerns or suggestions to the Social Work Program Director for further deliberation and decision-making.



### **National Association of Social Workers**

Students may join the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) as a student member at a reduced rate. Application forms are available at [www.socailworkers.org](http://www.socailworkers.org)

### **Student Governance**

Social Work students are encouraged to participate in university student government activities and to play an active role on its various committees. The SMSU Student Association is the student organization recognized to represent the interests of the student body in the University's governance structure, and is the communications vehicle to convey student views to the University administration relative to policy decisions (Student Senate) and educational programs and activities (Student Activities Committee). The Student Association is also comprised of a Public Relations Committee that works with community projects such as the Red Cross Blood Drive and the Student Judicial Board (a major component of the University Community Expectations Program).

Participation in student government is an opportunity to represent Social Work students and Social Work interests on campus. Refer to the SMSU Student Handbook for information on how to get involved or call 507-537-6140.

# **POLICIES AND GUIDELINES**

### **Ethical Social Work Practice and the Undergraduate Academy**

Each year the question arises: What is the responsibility of the Social Worker as faculty in the academy for professional gatekeeping? As in any professional arena of practice, and the academy is one of those arenas, the question is raised as to whom do we serve? Is it the profession of Social Work? Is it the academy? Is it the academy and its emphasis on retention of students, or is it the profession? And when is it inappropriate to retain a student enrolled in a Social Work program that is unable or unwilling to conduct the self according to the ethical standards for practice required by the profession?

The literature is quite clear on a Social Work program's responsibility to gatekeeping, and that is to ensure that students who graduate have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for beginning Social Work practice; can demonstrate the values of the Social Work profession; as well as demonstrate self-awareness, maturity, and responsibility. These professional values are codified in the National Association Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. Social Work practice is as much an expression of values and ethics as it is of knowledge and skills. Values and ethics must not be separated from our practice models, professional behavior, and academic performance standards in Social Work education.

All SMSU social work majors are expected to abide by the NASW Code of Ethics, and students admitted to the program sign a pledge to conduct themselves according to the Code of Ethics. The NASW Code of Ethics can be found at: <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

### **Social Work Program Policy on Classroom Behavior**

The following is a summary of expected classroom behavior, both in person and online. The full policy can be found at: <http://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/?id=1815>. Click on "Professional Development."

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:** Students are responsible for arriving to class on time and for communicating ahead of time (whenever possible) if they expect to be late. Online students are expected to be active in their D2L classroom and respond to all assignments and posts in a timely manner.

**CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR:** Students are expected to avoid all side conversations - either in sign, passed notes, wireless communication devices, or voice. Virtual classrooms and live Zoom sessions also have the same expectation of professionalism when working with other students and faculty.

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** Students are responsible for deactivating all cell phones or other wireless communication devices during class. Students are expected not to have technology that that will distract them from the course content (ear buds, headphones, etc.) **Students are not allowed to record other students, faculty or the course content without the instructor's permission.**

**E-MAIL:** Students will be expected to use and maintain their free SMSU E-mail address. **Students are expected to check their SMSU email on a regular basis** as this is the only way

for faculty to contact students.

**ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES:** Assignments are due as outlined in the course syllabus. No extensions or changes to assignments or test due dates will happen unless agreed upon by the course instructor. If extensions are given, students are expected to complete all work by the new due date.

**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USE:** All large language models (such as ChatGPT, Claude and Copilot) still tend to make up facts and fake citations. Artificial intelligence models tend to produce inaccurate outputs and image generators can occasionally come up with highly offensive products. Students are responsible for any inaccurate, biased, offensive or otherwise unethical content you submit regardless of whether it originally comes from you or an AI tool.

Generally, in the social work program, all work submitted must be your own. Contributions from anyone or anything else, including AI sources, must be properly quoted and cited every time they are used. Failure to do so violates SMSU's Academic Honesty Policy. Each course and instructor may have other information on use of AI tools for a specific assignment or course. Students are responsible for clarifying this information with a course instructor.

**FINALS WEEK:** Students are expected to be available through the last day of final exam week.

There are many other issues (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, violence, harassment...) that are covered in the SMSU Student Handbook. Students are expected to be familiar with the handbook and/or have a copy available for reference.

### **Guidelines for Termination for Academic and Professional Reasons**

The Social Work Program recognizes that there may be mitigating circumstances which influence a student's ability to function satisfactorily as it relates to likely performance as a Social Work practitioner. In such cases, at the request of a student, faculty field liaison, field instructor, or faculty member, the Social Work Program will review the student's status and act regarding continuance in the program. This could include, for example, a recommendation for study skills development or referral to other resources for resolving academic or personal problems. Knowledge, skill and value expectations are all important in a professional program as they relate to a student's likely performance as a Social Work practitioner.

A student in the Social Work major is expected to maintain the standards established by the Social Work Program regarding continuation in the major. Under ordinary circumstances, failure to meet the standards established by the Social Work Program shall result in discontinuance from the major. Many aspects of a student's performance, including non-academic problems, are reviewed when a decision is made to recommend discontinuance. Discontinuance can occur during any period of registration in the major.

Social Workers frequently work with individuals having various personal and emotional difficulties. The demands of the Social Work role require that students have the emotional, psychological, and intellectual resources to render effective assistance to those in need. The Social Work student will be evaluated not only academically, but also on professional attitudes, skills, and behaviors based on the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers

and the Minnesota Social Work Practice Act, Social Work Laws and Rules, 148B.26 (<https://mn.gov/boards/social-work/lawsandregulations/>). All students will be held to this standard regardless of where they live while in the program.

The Code of Ethics has placed further responsibility on Social Work programs to ensure that Social Work graduates are able to engage themselves with their clients in the practice of Social Work. Specifically, 4. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals: 4.05 Impairment states:

“a) Social Workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility.”

“b) Social Workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.”

The Social Work graduate is a professional prepared to work with people in a variety of human service settings. Therefore, the Social Work Program has established academic and professional performance expectations. Failure to meet academic requirements or to demonstrate professional conduct and relationship skills and behavior consistent with the values and ethics of the profession can result in discontinuance in the Social Work major.

Final authority regarding student continuation in the program rests with the Program Director of the Social Work Program. Social Work faculty will meet to discuss and review the issue and this information is held in confidence until the final decision is made known to the student.

#### **Academic Criteria for Discontinuance in the Social Work Major**

Students are in academic difficulty if their grade point average drops below 2.5 upon completion of one-half the total credits required in the major. Students may be advised to withdraw from the major if their cumulative grade point average falls to 2.25. The Social Work faculty reviews criteria 1, 2, and 3 at the time of application to the Social Work major:

1. Grade point average overall of 2.5 for all courses completed in the last seven years.
2. Grade point average overall of 2.5 in all courses required for the Social Work major.
3. Students must demonstrate competency in knowledge and understanding of Social Work theory, ethics and methods prior to admission to the field instruction course which is taken in the senior year.

#### **Other Reasons for Discontinuance**

While there are no rigid guidelines for assessing a student's lack of professional development and/or self-awareness which could result in a recommendation for discontinuance from the major, some of the examples of behavior which the Social Work Program reviews and evaluates in this process are the following:

- Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics
- Ability to relate to people with warmth and empathy, communicating feelings

appropriately.

- Capacity for an accepting attitude toward one's total self, including responsibility for meeting one's physical and emotional needs.
- Openness to change in oneself and others.
- Recognition of the essential worth and dignity of all human beings.
- Ability to respect and work with differences in people (race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion/spiritual beliefs, gender, value system, disability, or political affiliation).
- Ability to develop self-confidence and initiative in working with people.
- Ability to identify personal strengths, limitations, and motivations, especially as related to a decision to work with people.
- Ability to express thoughts with clarity in both written and oral form.
- Ability to ensure that one's own personal, religious, sexual and political preference are not imposed on clients.

Failure to meet generally accepted standards of professional conduct, personal integrity or emotional stability requisite for professional practice, inappropriate or disruptive behavior toward colleagues, faculty or staff (at school or field placement) can result in discontinuance from the Social Work major.

### **Discontinuance from Field Instruction**

All students receive adequate information about ethical and legal boundaries related to practice prior to entering Field Practicum. Violation of these boundaries results in immediate discontinuance from Field Practicum.

1. Substantiated complaints in either of the following areas will result in immediate suspension from Field Instruction:
  - a. Violation of client or agency confidentiality.
  - b. Violation of professional relationship boundaries including physical contact with clients, harassment or dual relationships.
2. Substantiated complaints in either of the following areas will result in immediate suspension from Field Instruction:
  - a. Evidence of current drug abuse including alcohol.
  - b. Evidence of mental/emotional instability which, in the judgment of the Field Supervisor/Instructor and Director of Field Education, jeopardizes clients' interests.
3. Substantiated complaints in either of the following areas will result in immediate expulsion from Field Instruction and termination from the Social Work Program:
  - a. Evidence of sexual activity or sexual contact with a client, or with client's relatives.
  - b. Felony charges that reflect personal behaviors incompatible with expected behaviors or ethics of professional Social Workers.

**Flagrant documented violation of the NASW Code of Ethics will result in termination from the Social Work Program.**

Decisions made to discontinue an individual from field instruction have a profound effect on a person's future career; therefore, these decisions are not made on the basis of allegation or

unverified circumstance. In any situation of potential discontinuance for professional reasons, there must be clear, concise documentation of the problem areas as well as verification that the Social Work Program and field instructor have discussed these with the student and attempted to ameliorate them.

Refer to the additional information on unprofessional conduct that is grounds for disciplinary and corrective action in the Minnesota Social Work Practice Act.

### **Faculty/Student Reconsideration Plan**

In the event that a student demonstrates emotional or mental instability, inadequate communication skills, insufficient academic ability, lacks the level of self-awareness necessary to pursue a Social Work career, or is suspended from Field Instruction, the following process will ensue:

1. Social Work faculty will document reasons for concern.
2. Social Work faculty will meet with the student and discuss how the skills or behaviors demonstrating a concern are negatively affecting the student's progress in the Social Work Program. The faculty team, with the student's input, will recommend a plan to improve skills and/or behaviors. If the student refuses the reconsideration proposal, the faculty will document and remind the student that:
  - a. continuation in the Social Work Program is dependent upon the previous academic and behavioral performance;
  - b. the student is responsible for meeting the academic, attitudinal, and behavioral standards of the Social Work Program; and
  - c. failure of the student to meet the program standards will result in discontinuance in the Social Work major.
3. If the student accepts the reconsideration proposal, a written contract with completion date will be signed by the student and the faculty team. The completion date may be renegotiated.
4. The reconsideration contract will be a part of the student's Social Work program file, unless the student requests in writing that the plan be confidential; then the plan will be kept separate from the student's Social Work program file. (See the discussion of Confidentiality of Records below.)
5. Continuation in the Social Work major is dependent upon completion of the reconsideration plan. In some cases, students will continue course work; in other cases, students will interrupt their progress and courses and/or field instruction pending completion of the reconsideration plan. (An example might be if a student exhibits unstable and unreliable behaviors in a class and a plan is developed to regain stability, the student delays completing major coursework and/or field instruction.
6. The Social Work faculty and student will evaluate if the reconsideration plan objectives have been met in a timely fashion. The faculty may recommend the following options:
  - a. continuation of the reconsideration plan for a specific period of time with expected outcome written into an amended reconsideration plan;
  - b. successful completion of plan, with recommendation that the student continue courses and practicum requirements towards graduation; or
  - c. documented failure to meet the objectives of the plan and dismissal from the

Social Work Program and major.

The faculty will inform the student of their right to appeal any Social Work Program action to the institution.

### **Confidentiality of Records**

All written deliberations shall be considered confidential and placed in the student's program file in the Social Work office unless the student requests otherwise. All materials submitted by students who are denied admission, withdraw, or are dismissed from the program are placed in the program file and will be kept for one year and then destroyed.

Faculty members may retain copies of letters and memoranda written in the course of their interactions with students.

### **Right of Appeal**

Applicants to the Social Work Program who are denied admission or are suspended, discontinued, or terminated from the program will have the right to appeal the decision. The appeal and grievance procedures are specified in the SMSU Student Handbook.

### **Procedures of Adjudication of Grievances or Appeals**

(Students should note that the SMSU catalog and the SMSU Student Handbook contain discussions of the various committees in the University that have been established to review student appeals concerning academic or disciplinary decisions, including grades.)

Students who believe that their rights have been violated or denied, who desire to appeal a decision by social work faculty, or who desire to appeal a decision for denial of admission to the Social Work Program or suspension/dismissal from the Social Work Program are encouraged to utilize the following formal appeal procedures within the Social Work Program:

1. The student may appeal the decision in writing by sending a written request for reconsideration to the Social Work Program Director within (ten) 10 business days of the decision. The written appeal must specify the basis for appeal.
2. The written appeal will be reviewed by all Social Work Program faculty, and the student will be given an opportunity to orally present their case in a hearing before all the Social Work faculty.
3. The student will be notified in writing of the faculty's decision within (ten) 10 business days of written notification of the appeal.
4. If the student remains dissatisfied with the decision, the student has the right to take the appeal to appropriate individuals and committees, as specified in the SMSU catalog, and in the SMSU Student Handbook, in the sections regarding student appeals.

### **Inclusive Non-Sexist Language**

In keeping with the commitment to nondiscrimination, the Social Work Program expects that in written and spoken communication all faculty members and students will use non-sexist, inclusive language, unless the gender is relevant to the focus and intent of the communication. Attention should be given to this policy for all levels of communication, including writing



assignments and oral presentations in classes.

### **Academic Advising**

All declared and admitted Social Work majors are assigned a Social Work faculty advisor. You may request any of the Social Work faculty to serve as your advisor. If you wish to change advisors, an advisor change form is available in the student's eservices.

Advising is mandatory prior to each semester's registration. The dates and time periods for advising are noted on the SMSU Academic Calendar, and students are expected to plan ahead in order to avoid scheduling conflicts with these advising sessions.

The advisor assists students with curriculum and schedule planning as long as the student is a declared social work major and/or has completed the formal social work admission's process. Each semester, the advisor reviews and approves the student's courses during the registration process, providing advisees with their unique registration access codes.

It is the advisor's responsibility to:

1. Assist the student with course selection and schedule planning;
2. Assist the student with career planning, including such issues as graduate school, volunteering, field placement setting preferences, resume preparation and employment; and,
3. Communicate information about employment and graduate education opportunities to students.

### **Professional Advising**

All Social Work faculty also conduct professional advising for all social work students. This may happen as part of the student's academic advising, during class or outside of class times throughout the student's time at SMSU. Professional advising also occurs often during the Field Seminar course when students are in their practicum. Professional advising is focuses on post-graduation preparation for students to provide an undemanding of employment, further education, supervisor for licensure and other important issues that students may face in the field.

### **Grading**

Students have the right to know the objectives of a course in which they are enrolled and the criteria that will be used in evaluating performance in a course. There will be a clear statement of grading criteria on all syllabi for the courses taught by Social Work faculty. A student may initiate a grade appeal if they have grounds to believe that:

1. The course objectives were significantly changed in a manner so as to create unfair treatment; or
2. The criteria for evaluations were significantly changed in a manner so as to create unfair treatment; or
3. Evaluation was arbitrary or capricious.

If a student has grounds to appeal a grade, they should present their case to the faculty member who awarded the grade. If the meeting of the faculty member and student fails to resolve the student's complaint, they may appeal to Academic Appeals Committee. Please refer to the

SMSU Student Handbook, under grade appeals, for further instructions on completing a Student Grade Appeal Form.

### **Student Files**

Student files for all pre-Social Work and Social Work majors are maintained within the Social Work Program. These files contain the completed applications for admission (when this process has been completed), field related paperwork (when completed by the student) and other data relevant to the student's educational progress. These files are maintained by the Social Work Program Director and their contents are only accessible to the Social Work faculty or appropriate staff. Student workers are not allowed access to these files.

A student has the right to review their own file, in accordance with the Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. A student may review their file with their Social Work advisor. They may use the grievance process as stated in the SMSU Social Work Student Handbook Procedures for Adjudication of Student Grievance or Appeals to remove any inaccurate material from the file.

### **Standards of Performance and Progress**

Definition of good academic standing: A student in good standing in the Social Work Program is one who maintains a minimum grade point average of 2.50 (on a 4.0 scale).

A student who receives an incomplete or in progress in any course required in the Social Work major must complete the course before the end of the next semester in which they are enrolled. If course requirements are not completed by that time, the "I" or "IP" will be changed to an "F" if graded on the A-F system, or to an "NC" if graded on the Credit/No Credit System. The instructor may extend the "I" grade for one semester.

A Social Work major must be a student in good academic standing, have completed all courses required in the Social Work major and have applied for admission to field instruction in SWRK 484 Pre-Field Practicum Seminar before beginning SWRK 499, Field Practicum.

Academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be grounds for awarding a grade of F or NC for the entire course. Information on academic dishonesty can be found in the SMSU Student Handbook and in SMSU Policy A-032.

As stated in the policy "Guidelines for Termination for Academic and Professional Reasons, a student in the Social Work Program is expected to exhibit the following behaviors:

- Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics.
- Ability to relate to people with warmth and empathy, communicating feelings appropriately.
- Capacity for an accepting attitude toward one's total self, including responsibility for meeting one's physical and emotional needs.
- Openness to change in oneself and others.
- Recognition of the essential worth and dignity of all human beings.
- Ability to respect and work with differences in people (race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion/spiritual beliefs, gender, value system, disability, or political

affiliation).

- Ability to develop self-confidence and initiative in working with people.
- Ability to identify personal strengths, limitations, and motivations, especially as related to a decision to work with people.
- Ability to express thoughts with clarity in both written and oral form.
- Ability to ensure that one's own personal, religious, sexual and political preference are not imposed on clients.
- Ability to use sound judgment, for example to seek help for medical, emotional or alcohol/chemical use problems.
- Conformance with the SMSU Student Code of Conduct, including plagiarism and cheating on examinations.

### **Written Class Assignments**

The ability to communicate effectively in writing is essential to professional Social Work practice. The Social Work program expects and requires papers, and other written class assignments, to be in good English and conform to accepted rules and conventions of good writing. Students should know and are expected to use APA formatting for all social work papers, unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Poor writing detracts from the quality of a paper, even though a student may have mastered the subject matter. If the paper contains misspelled words, errors in grammar and improper documentation, or if the paper is poorly prepared, the student's performance suffers accordingly. Professional effectiveness may also be adversely affected by poor writing because professional Social Workers are constantly communicating in writing through case records, reports and letters to clients, supervisors, administrators and other staff, legislators and other members of the community. Although individual instructors may establish more specific guidelines and requirements, in general the following rules or format should be followed:

- Written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, 8½ x 11 paper, with one-inch margins.
- Papers should be headed by a title, should be properly documented and, where appropriate, must include section and subsection headings and/or a references list.
- Papers should be carefully proofread to correct misspellings, errors in grammar and punctuation, and confusing sentences.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the representation of words, thoughts, and ideas of someone else as your own. Such misrepresentations of words, thoughts and ideas constitutes a form of theft. It is viewed by the Social Work program faculty as a major violation of ethical Social Work practice. Students found involved in plagiarism face the following possible penalties depending on the faculty members perception of the seriousness of the problem:

- failure in the course
- petition to remove the student from the program
- suspension from the university (see the SMSU Student Handbook)

### **Artificial Intelligence Use**

All large language models (such as ChatGPT, Claude and Copilot) still tend to make up facts and

fake citations. Artificial intelligence models tend to produce inaccurate outputs and image generators can occasionally come up with highly offensive products. Students are responsible for any inaccurate, biased, offensive or otherwise unethical content you submit regardless of whether it originally comes from you or an AI tool.

### **SMSU Code of Conduct**

Social Work students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the university's policies governing student behavior.

### **Non-Discrimination in Employment & Educational Opportunity**

The Minnesota State College and Universities Board of Trustees' 1B.1 Nondiscrimination in Employment and Education Opportunity Policy states: "No person shall be discriminated against in the terms and conditions of employment, personnel practices, or access to and participation in, programs, services, and activities with regard to race, sex, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, disability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or membership or activity in a local commission as defined by law." The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees' 1B.1.1 Report/Complaint of Discrimination/Harassment Procedure is available to all members of Southwest Minnesota State University.

Inquiries regarding the compliance may be directed to the Affirmative Action Officer, BA 257, Southwest Minnesota State University, 1501 State Street, Marshall, MN 56258, (507) 537-7500.

# **APPENDICES**

**Social Work Licensure**  
**Minnesota Statutes 2005, Chapter 148D**

The Minnesota Social Work Practice Act is the law enacted by the Minnesota Legislature which governs the licensure and regulation of social workers in the State of Minnesota. The regulations prohibit practicing social work, and the use of a title incorporating the words social work or social worker unless the individual holds either a temporary permit or a license as a licensed social worker. A BSSW student from an accredited social work program is eligible to complete an application to the Board of Social Work within six months of graduation, and upon approval, schedule the examination.

The Minnesota Social Work Practice Act defines the practice of social work as:

“Practice of social work” means working to maintain, restore, or improve behavioral, cognitive, emotional, mental, or social functioning of clients, in a manner that applies accepted professional social work knowledge, skills, and values, including the person-in-environment perspective, by providing in person or through telephone, video conferencing, or electronic means one or more of the social work services described in clauses (1) to (3). Social work services may address conditions that impair or limit behavioral, cognitive, emotional, mental, or social functioning. Such conditions include, but are not limited to, the following: abuse and neglect of children or vulnerable adults, addictions, developmental disorders, disabilities, discrimination, illness, injuries, poverty, and trauma. Social work services include:

1. providing assessment and intervention through direct contact with clients, developing a plan based on information from an assessment, and providing services which include, but are not limited to, assessment, case management, client-centered advocacy, client education, consultation, counseling, crisis intervention, and referral;
2. providing for the direct or indirect benefit of clients through administrative, educational, policy, or research services including, but not limited to:
  - i. advocating for policies, programs, or services to improve the well-being of clients;
  - ii. conducting research related to social work services;
  - iii. developing and administering programs which provide social work services;
  - iv. engaging in community organization to address social problems through planned collective action;
  - v. supervising individuals who provide social services to clients;
  - vi. supervising social workers in order to comply with the supervised practice requirements specified in sections 148D.100 to 148D.125; and
  - vii. engaging in clinical practice.”

For further information contact:  
Minnesota Board of Social Work  
335 Randolph Avenue, Suite 245  
St. Paul, MN 55102-5502  
[mn.gov/boards/social-work](http://mn.gov/boards/social-work)  
(612) 617-2100 or [social.work@state.mn.us](mailto:social.work@state.mn.us)

**NASW**

**CODE OF ETHICS**

**Code of Ethics  
of the National Association of Social Workers**

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

National Association of Social Workers  
750 First Street NE, Suite 800  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
www.socialworkers.org



# **APPLICATION TO THE MAJOR**

**APPLICATION TO THE SOCIAL WORK MAJOR**

<https://www.smsu.edu/academics/programs/socialwork/index.html>