

Review of the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) 44.0701

Context and overview. The Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) program is housed in the School of Social Work within the College of Arts and Sciences. The school also offers a Bachelor of Social Work program and is the host unit for the Center of Adoption Studies. The M.S.W. program is designed to prepare advanced social work practitioners for working with diverse individuals and families across the life-span. Most students who enroll in the program seek to provide clinical services to clients or become directors of social service agencies. Some seek positions in education or politics. Graduates of the M.S.W. program who subsequently complete 3,000 hours of supervised practice are eligible to earn professional licensure as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and practice independently. The M.S.W. program at Illinois State is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

Self-study process. The program review process for the M.S.W. program coincided with the process for reaffirmation of the School of Social Work by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Significant portions of the internal program review process were similar to the reaffirmation self-study process. Although the director of the School of Social Work was the primary author of the program review self-study report, the CSWE self-study report and the program review self-study report were written with collaboration and input from the entire faculty, particularly the sections regarding the curriculum. Sections of the reports related to student development and program administration were developed with consultation from the M.S.W. director of student services and the director of field education. Input from external stakeholders included discussion with the community advisory board and feedback from alumni surveys. Final review of the self-study report occurred at the all-faculty/staff retreat in August 2014.

Program curriculum. As a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the M.S.W. program at Illinois State has a curriculum that is highly regulated to comply with professional standards. The curriculum requires 33 credit hours in advanced social work study for students already possessing a Bachelor of Social Work degree from a program accredited by CSWE. Students coming to the program without such a degree must complete 27 credit hours in social work foundation courses before entering advanced social work study. Once in the advanced curriculum, students select from three sequences. The child and family practice sequence prepares students for agency-based practice with at-risk families. The school social work sequence prepares students for social work practice in schools. This sequence is approved by the Illinois State Board of Education. The gerontology practice sequence prepares students to work with older populations. Students in this sequence may also fulfill requirements for the Graduate Certificate in Social Aspects of Aging, administered by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. All advanced study students take courses in the content areas of human behavior in the social environment, practice, policy, and research. All students are required to complete a field practicum as well as an applied research project in lieu of a master's thesis.

Program or unit faculty. The School of Social Work has 12 tenure track faculty members (including the director) and three administrative/professional staff members. The three staff positions include the director of field education, the director of B.S.W. student services (advisor), and the director of M.S.W. student services (advisor). Each administrative/professional staff member teaches two or three courses a year. Faculty members who teach in the School of Social Work all maintain their commitment to the profession through leadership in teaching, scholarship, and service. As instructors in a professional preparation discipline, faculty members are expected to significantly contribute to service in order to maintain connections to the professional discipline of social work. Most faculty members sit on boards for social service agencies and professional organizations, provide consultation to agencies or professional bodies, conduct training, volunteer in service roles, or continue in limited secondary employment as practitioners. This involvement is critical to keeping faculty both connected with and current with the professional practice field.

Program goals and quality indices. The M.S.W. program is guided by five goals: to foster students' identification and conduct as professional social workers who engage in life-long professional development; to prepare students for strength-based, ethical advanced practice in agencies with diverse individuals and families across the life-span experiencing poverty, violence, mental illness, physical and developmental challenges, and substance abuse; to prepare students to provide leadership to advocate for social, organizational, community, economic, and policy change to advance human rights and a more just society; to prepare students to build on foundation knowledge

through critical thinking that integrates multiple sources of knowledge including theoretical and conceptual knowledge, practice wisdom, and knowledge generated through research to inform best practices; and to prepare students to contribute to the professional knowledge base and provide accountability to clients and stakeholders by evaluating programs and practices for ethical and effective service delivery. Indicators used by faculty to assess program quality relative to peer and benchmark programs include the extent to which the curriculum is infused with trauma-informed content, the ability to deliver the program online to meet student needs without sacrificing program quality, and the extent and strength of relations with program alumni.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) requires all accredited social work programs to be competency-based and to track student learning outcomes and development of professional competencies. Programs must demonstrate that students are competent on 41 practice behaviors embedded within 10 competency standards. The M.S.W. program conducts summative evaluation of student competency using a performance-based, naturalistic approach that includes embedded assignments across the curriculum.

Specialized accreditation. The M.S.W. program has been fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 2002. At its February 2015 meeting, the CSWE Commission on Accreditation voted to reaffirm accreditation of the M.S.W. program for eight years, ending in February 2023.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. The 2006 program review resulted in three recommendations: identify optimum enrollment, identify indicators of program uniqueness and ways to continually improve, and analyze factors impacting faculty recruitment and retention. Since the 2006 review, the School of Social Work has made changes to advisor job descriptions in order to positively impact recruitment, admission, and advisement. The faculty has identified as unique program qualities the choice to students of three sequences including the only gerontology practice sequence among public universities in Illinois, individualized attention, and the applied research project requirement for graduation. Also unique is the licensing preparation course provided free to program graduates. Since the last program review, faculty retention has stabilized. The school had four hires within three years and is well within the faculty-to-student ratio required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* projects that employment nationwide for social workers will increase 19 percent through 2020. That rate is higher than the average across all occupations. Employment in some social work specializations, such as gerontology social work and work with substance abuse disorders, is expected to increase even more than 19 percent. Local and statewide trends, such as a high number of anticipated retirements in the child welfare sector, and developments on the national level, such as the Affordable Care Act, will likely enhance employment opportunities.

Major findings of this program review self-study. The M.S.W. program at Illinois State University is vibrant, dynamic, and strong. The program meets all standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). In February 2015, the program was fully accredited by CSWE for eight years, the longest accreditation period granted by the council to any program. Program faculty members continue to be productive in scholarship and teaching, and program graduates are doing well in terms of acquiring employment. Financial support of the School of Social Work by university administration has been sufficient to maintain program quality. Two areas of concern identified through the self-study process are the need for continued focus on student recruitment and the need for revisions to the curriculum to align with recent trends in the profession.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. Through the self-study process, the School of Social Work has identified four initiatives to improve the M.S.W. program. School of Social Work administrators and advisors will continue to enhance recruitment and retention efforts to meet target enrollment each year. This will be accomplished by developing and implementing an aggressive plan to recruit recent graduates of undergraduate social work programs at institutions across the state, recent graduates from related fields, and community social service employees who seek to advance their knowledge, skills, and career. Faculty members will intentionally and proactively engage in retention efforts, and meeting agendas will include as a standing item discussion of how the program can support students experiencing challenges in completing the program. Second, M.S.W. program administrators and advisors will develop and implement a plan to consistently track alumni, including their contact

information and employment. Nurturing closer and sustained relationships with alumni may lead to new field practicum sites, high-quality guest speakers in the classroom, opportunities for consultations with the program regarding developing trends in the profession, and financial contributions to the University. Third, program faculty will implement a strategic review and revision of the M.S.W. program curriculum to strengthen content regarding relevant trends in the profession. Fourth, program faculty will assess feasibility of offering more online courses or hybrid courses (courses with both face-to-face and online delivery).

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a well written, complete and forward-looking self-study report. The committee thanks the program for the detail with which it has explained the curriculum and for its thoughtful and constructive analysis of both IBHE comparator and aspirational programs.

The committee recognizes program faculty for adopting a curriculum that accommodates a variety of student backgrounds, interests, and life situations. The curriculum includes plans of study for students with or without a social work background, for students interested in completing the program full-time or part-time, and for students interested in any of three specializations. The committee commends program faculty for introduction of the gerontology practice sequence in 2010, the only such M.S.W. sequence at Illinois public universities. The committee also commends the program for its efforts to recruit and retain high-quality students, including development of a recruitment plan and assigning recruitment, admission, and advising functions for all M.S.W. students to a single staff person.

The committee commends faculty for adoption of an intricate performance-based student learning outcomes assessment plan. The plan aligns embedded assignments with Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education in each of the three program sequences. Student performance is evaluated relative to the standards at three performance levels: simulation, written application of content to field clients, and student performance with actual clients.

The committee recognizes faculty members for their commitment to the social work profession as demonstrated by their research and scholarship in their areas of specialization and by their professional service through involvement with organizations on the local, state, and national levels. By incorporating their research and service experiences and their professional experiences into their courses, faculty members are able to instruct students in the latest theories and practices in the discipline. Faculty research has also been used by the state to guide child and family welfare policies and programs. The committee also recognizes program faculty members for their commitment to quality teaching through their extensive participation in professional development programs and their use of feedback mechanisms such as third-party chat sessions with students.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2022, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- Implement the recently-adopted recruitment plan with a goal of annually meeting admission targets, and identify and implement initiatives intended to support and retain students once they are in the program; the plan should include initiatives to increase male representation among students.
- Complete a comprehensive review of the M.S.W. curriculum, then develop and implement a plan to update the curriculum with more trauma-infused and practice-relevant content.
- In connection with the curriculum review and utilizing findings from the analysis of aspirational programs conducted for this program review self-study, explore the feasibility of adding more online or hybrid online/face-to-face courses in response to demand from current or prospective students.
- Continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program improvements and document how that has been addressed.

- Continue efforts to sustain male representation among faculty in the School of Social Work at or above average levels across all social work programs in the United States.
- Develop and implement a systematic approach to regular communication with program alumni to maintain information regarding their successes in employment and advanced education and to encourage their ongoing involvement with the program through sponsorship of practicum sites, mentoring students, guiding curriculum development, and giving; means of communication to be explored include, but are not limited to, enhanced use of social media tools and development of a dynamic alumni section on the School of Social Work website.
- Explore options for increasing the number of graduate assistantships with tuition waivers assigned to the school, particularly to assist with faculty research and with operations of the Center for Adoption Studies.



Comparative Data, Master of Social Work (44.0701)

Fall Enrollment

<u>University</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>
Chicago State University	146	147	137	127	135
Governors State University	89	102	119	126	136
Illinois State University	66	61	70	66	66
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	110	95	96	112	106
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	76	93	84	65	66
U of I at Chicago	385	403	426	426	397
U of I at Urbana/Champaign	284	281	291	270	267
<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>1,156</i>	<i>1,182</i>	<i>1,223</i>	<i>1,192</i>	<i>1,173</i>

Fiscal Year Degrees

<u>University</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>
Chicago State University	38	47	50	30	51
Governors State University	38	36	38	52	48
Illinois State University	27	18	27	25	24
Southern Illinois University Carbondale	63	62	54	65	67
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	19	33	54	35	39
U of I at Chicago	188	204	206	226	200
U of I at Urbana/Champaign	123	141	113	166	126
<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>496</i>	<i>541</i>	<i>542</i>	<i>599</i>	<i>555</i>