Section 1: Introduction, Administrative Structure, Admission to the MSW Program
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Preface

The Student Handbook is prepared by the Office of the Academic Dean to provide essential information to students in the School of Social Work. It is not intended to be a complete statement of all school policies. The policies and practices described are subject to change at the discretion of the School of Social Work. They are not to be considered or otherwise relied upon as legal terms and conditions of enrollment, and the language used in this Handbook is not intended to create a contract between the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work and its students. To the extent any policy contained in this Handbook is inconsistent with the law, such policy is superseded by law.

The online handbooks aim to provide the most current information possible; sites are updated regularly. However, information contained in the MSW Handbook is subject to change at any time. The handbooks are intended to serve as a general source of information and are in no way intended to state contractual terms.
**School of Social Work Mission**

The mission of the School of Social Work is to advance knowledge and to apply that knowledge for the fulfillment of human potential through the prevention and amelioration of social problems. The School is committed to promoting the values of social and economic justice. Recognizing the complexities of contemporary society, the School dedicates itself through its educational, research, and public service activities to advocating for a society that respects the dignity and achievement of all individuals, families, and communities.

**MSW Mission**

In furtherance of the School’s mission, the MSW Program strives to prepare graduates with the specialized knowledge and skills needed to engage in empirically-supported and culturally-competent advanced social work practice – either Direct Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups or Community, Organization, and Social Action – that reflects the social work profession’s values, traditions and philosophy.
Welcome Message from the Dean

As the Dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh I welcome you to our School. Founded in 1918, this School has a long and distinguished history of service, research, and scholarship. We are very proud of our legacy for being a school which values activists and organizers, as well as scholars and thinkers. Our graduates and faculty are continuing in the 21st century to build on this legacy.

At the same time, while proud of our past, we are not resting on our laurels, but are forging ahead addressing old problems and facing new challenges that confront today's society and the world. The quality of our BASW, MSW, and PhD programs are among the very best in the country, and we continue to enhance the programs. The School has an average enrollment of 600 students with 500 students in practicum sites throughout the greater Pittsburgh region. We continue to have substantive depth in both direct practice with individuals, families, and groups as well as in intervention and practice in community organization and social administration.

All members of our faculty are engaged in teaching and scholarship. They are highly qualified experts in their fields who are enthusiastic and engaged in a multitude of projects ranging from child welfare, mental health, community development, substance abuse, work with the elderly, domestic violence, diagnosis and treatment of families and their children, issues related to incarceration, reducing educational disparities, and empowering youth and communities, just to name a few.

As we continue to take on new initiatives, we are very fortunate to have the broad support of the larger University, community institutions, philanthropic foundations, and public and private agencies. All these factors have come together to create among the faculty and students a new sense of excitement, exhilaration, and commitment. Unquestionably, these are exciting times for our school! We look forward to preparing practitioners who will have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to make ours a better world for everyone.

Sincerely,

Larry E. Davis, PhD
Dean
Donald M. Henderson Professor
Administrative Structure

The administrative structure of the School of Social Work is as follows:

Dean Larry E. Davis
Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Valire Carr Copeland
Director of Admissions & Student Affairs Philip Mack
Administrative Assistant to the Dean Rosie Rinella
Business Manager Megan Soltesz
Director, B.A.S.W. Program Keith Caldwell
Director, M.S.W. Program Lynn Coghill
Director, Ph.D. Program Christina Newhill
Director, Field Education John Dalessandro
Director, Continuing Education Program Tracy Soska
Director, Career Services and Alumni Affairs Bobby Simmons
Director, Constituent Relations Tony Gacek
Director, Strategic Planning & Quality Assurance Hidenori Yamatani

MSW Concentration Chairpersons

Direct Practice Rachel Fusco
COSA Tracy Soska

Contact Persons for Certificate Programs

Children, Youth & Families Helen Cahalane
Gerontology Rafael Engel
Home & School Visitor Deborah Robinson
Human Services Management Tracy Soska
Integrated Health Care Certificate Daniel Rosen
Mental Health Lynn Coghill

Liaison Persons for Joint Degree Programs

School of Social Work MSW/Ph.D. Christina Newhill
School of Social Work (MSW)/ Daniel Rosen
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs Valire Copeland
School of Social Work (MSW)/
Graduate School of Public Health (MPH)
School of Social Work (MSW)/
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Program John Wallace
School of Social Work (MSW)/School of Law (JD) Jeffrey Shook
**Faculty Biographies**

Faculty Biographies can be accessed on the School of Social Work website at [http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/people](http://www.socialwork.pitt.edu/people).

**Committees of the School**

Student participation on academic committees is encouraged. Information about the purposes and functions of the committees is distributed during the fall term. At that time, students may choose a committee in the area of their concern and become full members of the assigned committees. The Student Executive Council identifies student representatives.

Following are the standing committees of the School:

- Academic Integrity and Academic Review Committee*
- Admissions Committee*
- Affirmative Action Committee*
- B.A.S.W. Program Committee*
- Budget and Policy Planning Committee
- Community, Organization, and Social Action Committee*
- Data Management Committee
- Direct Practice Committee*
- Dual and Joint Degree Committee
- Educational Policies Committee
- Faculty Executive Committee
- Library Committee
- M.S.W. Program Committee*
- Ph.D. Program Committee*
- Promotion and Tenure Committee
- Public Relations and Marketing Committee
- Research Advisory Committee

*Student representatives sit on these committees. In addition, each concentration holds occasional meetings that students in the concentration are welcome to attend. Student participation in these meetings is encouraged.*
Participation of Students in Faculty Candidate Reviews

Occasionally, the School has faculty vacancies and interviews a number of candidates for possible employment. Students are encouraged to attend the public colloquium of faculty candidates and are provided with the opportunity to submit written feedback. Time is allotted for each faculty candidate to meet with interested students. The Office of the Dean will post notices of faculty candidate reviews on the bulletin boards on the 22nd floor of the Cathedral of Learning and will notify the Student Executive Council as soon as interview appointments have been arranged with the candidates.
Master of Social Work Program

The University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work, successor to the Division of Social Work in the Department of Sociology, was founded in September 1918 and accepted its first class of Master of Social Work (MSW) students that year. During the MSW Program’s more than half century of existence, there have been significant social, economic, and political changes in the U.S. and around the world. The MSW Program takes pride in its history and in the commonalities that remain as it looks to the future. The MSW curriculum has been developed to competently meet the needs of the 21st century problems and situations.

The MSW Program expects students to play an active role both in their own education and in the life of the program. To this end, MSW students are encouraged to participate in student-run groups (See Student Organizations section of the Handbook) as well as in School committees. MSW students are also expected to adhere to the policies of the program, School, and University, as well as demonstrate behavior consonant with the NASW Code of Ethics. Many of the administrative and academic policies relevant to MSW students are presented in the Academic Policies portion of the Handbook. Finally, students in the MSW Program are encouraged to make use of the University’s rich resources (see Items of Special Interest to Students in the Handbook).

The MSW Program’s mission is to prepare graduates with the specialized knowledge and skills needed to engage in empirically-supported and culturally-competent advanced social work practice – either Direct Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups or Community, Organization and Social Action – that reflects the social work profession’s values, traditions, and philosophy.

Graduates of the MSW Program are expected to practice in a manner consistent with social work traditions, values, and ethics, as expressed in the NASW Code of Ethics. Specifically, graduates of the MSW Program will be able to competently engage in advanced social work practice. As such, it is our goal that by completion of the program, students will be prepared to:

2. Practice according to the principles, values, and ethics that guide the social work profession (EP 2.1.2, EP 2.1.3).
3. Influence social policies with the goal of alleviating poverty, oppression, and social injustice as well as advocating for human rights (EP 2.1.3, EP 2.1.4, EP 2.1.5, EP 2.1.6, EP 2.1.8).
4. Identify and improve the bio-psycho-social, spiritual, and cultural functioning (EP 2.1.7, EP 2.1.9).
5. Demonstrate practice from a culturally-competent perspective which recognizes and appreciates diverse cultures, particularly those that differ from one’s own (EP 2.1.4).”
The MSW curriculum is designed to achieve the Program’s mission and goals by providing students who enter with a liberal arts base, a professional education that includes both breadth and depth in knowledge and skill development. The foundation curriculum addresses the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values that embody generalist social work practice. Upon this foundation, required of all MSW students, rests the two skill concentration curricula: Direct Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups (Direct Practice); and Community Organization and Social Action (COSA). Each of the skill concentrations provides for the development of in-depth specialized competencies that prepares students for autonomous practice at an advanced level of professional social work practice.

**Advising**

On orientation day, students meet with their advisor. In most instances, that advisor follows the student throughout the MSW Program. Each advisor will work with student advisees to clarify educational options, to answer questions about the MSW program, to identify career opportunities, and to serve as a primary contact person. (See School of Social Work Policy #10:1-Policy in Advising.)

Advisors are to be the first point of contact for any or all of the following:

a. registration (including add/drop, leaves of absence, and withdrawals);

b. change of concentration and selection of specialization or certificate programs;

c. clarification of all academic policies and procedures (i.e., advanced standing and exemption, graduation requirements, grading policies, directed study);

d. discussions regarding academic expectations and performance;

e. information about other departments and/or programs within the School of Social Work and the University of Pittsburgh;

f. planning an educational program in accordance with career interests.

In addition, the advisor may serve as the liaison to the student’s field placement, particularly during the concentration field experience. Grades for fieldwork are submitted by the field liaison/advisor (in consultation with the field instructor).

Please consider your advisor as the person with whom you discuss your experiences as a student in the School. Do not hesitate to telephone or e-mail for an appointment. While other faculty members are also available for consultation, these discussions should supplement (not replace) the advisory relationship.

Requests for a change of advisor should be discussed with the present advisor and then directed to the MSW Program Director.
**MSW Admission Policy**

The School’s Admissions Office processes all MSW applications. The School’s Director of Admissions makes all admission decisions when the applicant’s undergraduate grade point average is 3.0 or higher, while the School’s Admissions Committee makes all admission decisions when the grade point average is 2.99 or less.

All accepted MSW applicants are notified by e-mail and by an official acceptance letter of their offer of admission to the School of Social Work. Only applicants who are rejected by the School are notified solely by an official letter. Applicants who are either provisionally accepted or have yet to take a 3-credit course in descriptive statistics are notified of the special circumstances to their admission in both their e-mail acceptance letter and their official acceptance letters (see section below MSW Program requirements for further explanation).

**MSW Program Prerequisites (#15:8)**

**Definition**

The MSW Program has one (1) admission prerequisite—satisfactory completion of an undergraduate or graduate 3-credit course in either descriptive statistics or quantitative analysis.

**Procedure**

It is required that all admitted students complete a 3-credit course in either descriptive statistics or quantitative analysis prior to the start of the MSW Program. Students who are admitted to the School without having successfully completed a statistics or quantitative analysis course must successfully complete this coursework during either the Spring or Summer semester prior to the start of the Fall semester.

All students have the responsibility to submit an official transcript to the School’s Office of Admissions verifying successful completion of this prerequisite requirement. **No student will be allowed to matriculate into the program without successfully meeting this requirement.**

Students will be allowed to register for courses prior to the start of the semester. However, documentation of successful completion of the prerequisite must be submitted prior to the first day of Fall semester in order for the student to attend their courses. **The School will administratively drop the student from all courses and their admission will be deferred for the following academic year if documentation of successful completion of the prerequisite has not been received by the Office of Admissions.**

**MSW Program Requirements**

The MSW degree requires the completion of a minimum of 60 credits—42 class and 18 field practicum credits. Students who complete the MSW Program’s full-time course of study can earn their MSW degree in two years. Students enrolled on a part-time basis have a maximum of four years to complete all degree requirements (see School of Social Work Policy 26:1 in the academic policy section of the Handbook).
Full-time students who are admitted to the MSW Program with provisional status have one semester to demonstrate satisfactory academic performance. Part-time students admitted provisionally must demonstrate satisfactory academic performance by the end of their second semester of enrollment (i.e., at the completion of four foundation courses: Social Welfare; Foundations of Research, Human Behavior and Social Environment; and Foundations of Social Work and Diverse Populations). All students admitted provisionally are notified both in their e-mail acceptance letter and their official acceptance letter of their provisional status. It is the official acceptance letter that informs full-time students that they have one semester and part-time students that they have two semesters to demonstrate satisfactory academic performance of maintaining a minimum GPA of 3.0.

Students admitted to the MSW Program must possess a bachelor’s degree (School of Social Work Policy 15:7), a minimum of a four-year 3.0 grade point average, 30 college credits in both the social sciences and liberal arts, and a three (3) credit course in descriptive statistics. Students who are admitted to the program in the Fall Term are required to complete the statistics course requirements before enrolling in Fall Term courses. Students who have not completed this requirement prior to the beginning of the Fall Term will not be allowed to continue in the program.

Students in the MSW Program must take required courses for a letter grade. Field education must be taken for an S/NC grade. No student will be permitted to graduate with a grade of C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F in a required course or a grade of NC in field education. A student who has received a failing grade in a required course has one opportunity only to repeat the course and the second grade received will be used in calculating the student’s GPA, provided that the student has completed a Course Repeat Option form. The option of re-doing a field placement in which a grade of NC, or not satisfactory, was earned can be exercised only once. In addition, students must maintain a minimum overall GPA of 3.0. Should a student’s overall GPA fall below 3.0, the student shall be placed on academic probation. See School of Social Work Policy 9:3 in the academic policy section of the Handbook for a fuller description of these requirements and standards.

Both the class and field requirements include foundation and skill concentration curricula. The MSW foundation curriculum is the same for all MSW degree students. Students who possess an undergraduate degree in social work awarded in the past seven academic calendar years by a social work program may be granted advanced standing credits for a maximum of four foundation courses and six foundation field credits. In addition, such students may be granted an exemption from the fifth foundation course. Students who do not have advanced standing may take exemption examinations in research and human behavior and the social environment if they have strong academic backgrounds in these areas (see School of Social Work Policy on Advanced Standing, Transfer Credit, or Exemption [25:2] in the academic policy section of the Handbook).

All students must complete the School's designated class and field requirements for one of the two skill concentrations: Direct Practice with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups (Direct Practice) or Community, Organization, and Social Action (COSA). In each skill concentration, students complete required skill courses; skill electives; second-level HBSE, research, and policy having content relevant to the concentration; general electives; and field education related to the concentration (School of Social Work Policy 5:5). Students interested in
changing their concentration after beginning the MSW Program must be able to show that the change would contribute directly to the student’s educational goals and career plans. They should discuss this matter first with their advisor and subsequently with the two concentration chairs. The MSW Program Director will then approve the change in concentration and assign a new academic advisor. The procedures for changing concentration are presented in more detail in School of Social Work Policy 5.3, which can be found in the academic policy section of the Handbook.

**Credit for Life, Volunteer, or Employment Experience (#25:4)**

Academic or field education credit shall not be granted in the MSW Program for life, volunteer, or employment experience.

**Policy on Provisional Admission (#15:11)**

This policy codifies the intent and language of acceptance letters (i.e., current practice).

**Definition**

An applicant whose cumulative undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) is below the 3.00 level required for admission to the MSW Program may be admitted on provisional status. Admission on provisional status is at the discretion of the Director of Admissions and the Admissions Committee, based on a review of application materials.

**Requirements**

A student admitted on provisional status must demonstrate satisfactory academic performance in the MSW Program in order to be removed from that status. Satisfactory academic performance is defined as:

A. Students who enter the MSW Program without advanced standing (i.e., do not have a bachelor’s degree in social work awarded by a CSWE – accredited undergraduate social work program within the seven academic calendar years prior to MSW Program admissions), must achieve a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 in the first four (4) foundation courses (HBSE, Social Welfare, Foundations of Social Work Practice with Diverse Populations, and Generalist Foundations of Social Work Practice and Field Seminar). These courses are normally completed in the first semester of full-time study or during the first two semesters of part-time study.

B. Students who enter the MSW Program with advanced standing (i.e., have a bachelor’s degree in social work awarded by a CSWE – accredited undergraduate social work program within seven academic calendar years prior to MSW Program admissions) must achieve a minimum GPA of 3.00 in their first three (3) or more courses if not taking field courses during their first semester. These courses typically include the first required concentration skill course, second-level HBSE, a general elective, and concentration field work. These courses are normally completed in the first semester of full-time study or during the first two semesters of part-time study.
Procedures

Any student admitted on provisional status who fails to demonstrate satisfactory academic performance (3.00 GPA), at the end of one (1) full-time semester or two (2) part-time semesters, will be dismissed from the MSW Program.

Transfer Credits

Students who within the past seven academic calendar years have completed graduate level course work can have their transcript evaluated to determine if these credits can be transferred. A maximum of 12 class credits can be transferred for post-baccalaureate course work completed in a field or discipline other than social work. Transfer credits are not given for internships performed during graduate studies in a field or discipline other than social work.

Students who have begun but have not completed a full year of graduate social work education at another CSWE-accredited master’s program can receive up to 12 class credits and six (6) field education credits. Those who have completed a full year at another CSWE-accredited MSW program can receive a maximum of 24 class and six (6) field education credits.

Students interested in having their transcripts evaluated for transfer credit should contact the MSW Program Director. For further information on the requirements for obtaining transfer credit, please consult the School of Social Work Policy on Advanced Standing, Transfer Credit, or Exemption (25:2), which is included in the academic policy section of this Handbook.

The MSW Program does not grant academic or field education credit for life, volunteer, or employment experience (School of Social Work Policy 25:4).

Directed Study

The major purpose of a directed study is to provide students with the opportunity to explore in-depth a specific area of social work beyond that available in regularly scheduled courses. A directed study involves student-initiated learning that is guided by a faculty member. A directed study can entail exploring the literature in a specific content area, engaging in research that contributes to social work knowledge and practice, or developing professional materials. A directed study can be taken for 1, 2, or 3 credits depending on the level of work required. For additional information about the requirements and procedures for directed studies, please see School of Social Work Policy 27:1 in the academic policy section of this Handbook.

Enrollment Options

Full-Time Enrollment

Students who enter the MSW Program without advanced standing can complete all their course and field education requirements in two years of full-time matriculation. The MSW Program defines full-time enrollment status as registration for 9 to 15 credits in the Fall and Spring semester of each year. A student can complete the MSW Program by registering for fifteen (15) credits each in Fall and Spring for two consecutive academic years. During the Fall Semester of the first year, students take four (4) three-credit courses and three (3) credits of
foundation field for a total of 15 credits. In the Spring Semester, they also enroll in four (4) three-credit courses and three (3) credits of foundation fieldwork. Students complete their first field experience during the Fall and Spring Semesters of their first year for a total of six (6) credits over two semesters. During their second year, students take three (3) academic courses and six (6) credits of concentration field placement for a total of fifteen (15) credits each term.

Part-Time Enrollment

Part-time students who do not have advanced standing complete the five MSW foundation courses during the Fall, Spring, and Summer Semesters of their first year. Only after these Foundation courses are completed, are part-time students permitted to take concentration courses; second-level HBSE, Policy, or Research courses; or skill electives. Part-time students begin their first field placement in conjunction with Generalist Practice in their third semester. Part-time students must initiate their field education on completion of twenty-one (21) credits of course work.

To maintain their part-time status, students must register during at least two of the three terms in the academic year. Students can exercise the following options during each of the semesters in which they register:

- Two courses (3 credits per course); or
- One course (3 credit) plus a minimum of 3 field credits; or
- A minimum of 6 field credits (equivalent to 2 courses).

Part-time students have four (4) years to complete all of the requirements for their MSW degree (see School of Social Work Policy 26:1 in the academic policy section of this Handbook).
Advanced Standing Enrollment

Students who have received a social work degree within the past seven academic calendar years from an undergraduate program are eligible for advanced standing. Those granted advanced standing during the admission process can receive up to 12 academic credits. The number of advanced standing credits granted depends on the comparability of the student’s undergraduate courses to this Program’s Foundation courses and on the grades obtained in those undergraduate courses (i.e., must be a “B-” grade or higher). Such students also may be granted an exemption from a Foundation course. Eligibility for a course exemption is contingent upon the comparability of the students undergraduate course(s) to this Program’s Foundation course and on the grade(s) obtained (i.e., “B-” grade or higher). If an exemption is granted, the student must fulfill the three academic credits through additional coursework, typically by enrolling in another elective course. In addition, students entering with advanced standing can receive six (6) field education credits. The six (6) credits of field education is granted based on the number of hours of field experience completed at the undergraduate level provided that the undergraduate social work practicum totals 400 or more clock hours and the student has achieved a passing grade or at least a “B-“ grade or better.

Students who enter the MSW Program with advanced standing begin their studies in the Fall Semester. If they are full-time and are not provisionally admitted, they typically register for three (3) academic courses and six (6) credits of field education in both the Fall and Spring Semesters. In the Fall Semester of their second year, students with advanced standing register for their remaining four (4) courses. Full-time students who have advanced standing graduate in December of their second year (see School of Social Work Policy 25:2 in the academic policy section of this Handbook).

Students who have been granted advanced standing at the point of admission are allowed to pursue their MSW degree on a part-time basis. As described above, part-time students must register during at least two of the three academic terms each year and must take an approved number of academic and/or field education credits during each term of enrollment. Part-time students with advanced standing must complete all of the requirements for the MSW degree in four (4) years (see School of Social Work Policy 26:1 in the academic policy section of this Handbook).