

REVIEW OF THE B.S.W. IN SOCIAL WORK
Classification of Instruction Programs (CIP) Code: 44.0701
Social Work

OVERVIEW

The Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) program at Illinois State University is housed within the School of Social Work in the College of Arts and Sciences. The School offers two degree programs: a Bachelor of Social Work and a Master of Social Work and also houses the Center for Adoption Studies. The B.S.W. program is an upper-division professional preparation program that admits a new junior cohort each fall. Rooted in a strong liberal arts foundation, the B.S.W. program prepares students for generalist practice across individual, family, group, organizational, and community systems. The curriculum is competency-based and aligned with the accreditation standards of the Council on Social Work Education, including a required 500-hour practicum that connects classroom learning with applied experience. Students in the program engage in interdisciplinary coursework, experiential learning activities such as poverty simulations and legislative advocacy, and co-curricular opportunities including participation in the Social Work Club. The School of Social Work fosters a supportive, student-centered environment and emphasizes social justice, cultural humility, and civic engagement, preparing graduates to advocate for equity and systemic change across diverse settings.

Enrollment and Degrees Conferred by Plan of Study, Fall Census Day, 2017-2024
B.S.W. in Social Work, Illinois State University
First Majors Only

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Enrollments	201	196	200	203	199	206	207	228
Degrees	68	57	60	51	60	57	49	50

Table notes:
Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2024 consists of the following terms: summer 2023, fall 2023, and spring 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process

The program review process began the year after the reaffirmation process for the School of Social Work’s external accrediting organization, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), completed with a full reaffirmation of eight years, ending in February 2031. Significant portions of the internal program review process were similar to the reaffirmation self-study process. The portions of the program review that overlapped with the CSWE self-study were completed by the Interim Director of the School of Social Work. The CSWE self-study and the program review were written with collaboration and input from the entire faculty, particularly the sections regarding the curriculum. Sections that related to student development and administration of the programs were developed with consultation from the B.S.W. Director of Student Services, the Director of Field Education, and the B.S.W. Program Director. The CSWE self-study included input from students with annual program chats, and student discussion with the accreditation site visitors. The self-study included input from external stakeholders with discussion between the Community Advisory Board and accreditation site visitors, and feedback from alumni surveys. Final faculty review of the program review self-study occurred at an all-faculty meeting in August 2022.

Program curriculum

The B.S.W. program’s core curriculum is highly prescriptive to remain in good standing with our accrediting body. CSWE requires that core professional content be built on a liberal arts foundation. Students complete the liberal

arts component of the major during their first two years, through courses meeting General Education program requirements, along with an Introduction to Social Work course, SWK 170. The core major curriculum includes 66 credit hours taken primarily during the junior and senior years. Courses are sequenced so knowledge acquisition is horizontally and vertically integrated. Each course is only offered one time a year, and students matriculate as a cohort in the same classes, in sequenced order. Students complete three courses in human behavior in the social environment, six practice courses, two policy courses, one research course, and four field practicum and seminar courses.

Academic 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 B.S.W. Student Services (advisor), the Director of Field Education (internship coordinator), 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 B.S.W. program is guided by four goals:

1. to foster students' identification and conduct as professional social workers;
2. to prepare students for strength-based, ethical generalist practice in agency-based settings to work with diverse clients at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice;
3. to prepare students to advocate for social, organizational, community, economic, and policy change to advance human rights and create a more just society; and
4. to prepare students with a liberal arts foundation to employ critical thinking to integrate multiple sources of knowledge including theoretical and conceptual knowledge, practice wisdom, and knowledge generated through evidence-based research to inform generalist best practices that are responsive to evolving needs.

Indicators used by faculty to assess program quality relative to peer and benchmark programs include the quality of the student grievance policy and the option of an accelerated pathway for undergraduate non-majors to pursue social work graduate education at their own university.

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 9 competency standards. Throughout the review period, the B.S.W. program conducted summative evaluation of student competency using a performance-based, naturalistic approach that includes embedded assignments across the curriculum. However, at the suggestion of CSWE reaffirmation site visitors, in 2024, it replaced the elaborate course embedded assessment plan with the Social Work Education Assessment Project (SWEAP) platform.

Specialized accreditation

The B.S.W. program has been fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) since 2002. At its February 2023 meeting, the CSWE Commission on Accreditation voted to reaffirm accreditation of the B.S.W. program for eight years, ending in February 2031.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review

There were six recommendations from the 2014 program review:

1. Work with Enrollment Management and Academic Services to stabilize enrollment within a range that is sustainable over the next eight years given resources available to the program; the plan should include initiatives to increase male representation among students and to maintain the quality of students with respect to average ACT scores and external transfer grade point average;
2. 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;
3. Develop and implement a plan to increase involvement of B.S.W. majors in the newly-restructured Honors program and in the ISULeads Leadership Certificate Program; the committee suggests exploring ways to involve students in the programs before the students are officially admitted to the B.S.W. program;
4. Working with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), develop and implement a plan to qualify B.S.W. graduates to engage in child welfare functions immediately upon employment with DCFS; the plan should address delivery of content required by DCFS and administration of examinations required by the agency;
5. 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; and
6. Continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program improvements and document how that has been addressed.

The School increased its enrollment from an average of 60 students to 77 students for the Fall 2024 cohort. Social Work's male student count remains out of balance with ISU's current population of men. Although the School honors the rich tradition of its historically female-led profession, it actively recruits male students to join our ranks. The B.S.W. program maintains a minimum GPA admission requirement of 2.5. Students who meet the minimum GPA requirement are admitted if they meet the other admission requirements. Concerns ACT exam results do not predict success in college and are biased against minoritized groups led the School to deemphasize ACT scores in its admissions decisions. The School of Social Work added two male faculty members and hired a male Director of M.S.W. Student Services. Honors enrollment has remained relatively stable since the last program review. Renewed efforts are being made to add information regarding the Honors Program to presentations and materials for all University Open House information sessions, recruitment events, and Preview sessions. We are increasing promotion of the Honors Program to all social work majors, as well as through the Social Work Club and Social Work Themed Living-Learning Community. The School of Social Work now offers an opportunity to complete two specialty Child Welfare Classes (SWK 323 and SWK 324) to expedite the process of becoming certified child welfare specialists upon completion of their social work degree. Student success on the nine competencies is measured annually with data embedded in each required course, including in the field education learning contract. Beginning in 2024, the program will use the Social Work Education Assessment Project (SWEAP) platform to measure the competencies and make program improvements. Content-relevant outcomes will continue to be examined and responded to within each content committee. Annual program chats are reviewed by the Program Directors, the School Director, and the Curriculum Committee who address students' concerns where appropriate.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand

There is a growing acceptance of online platforms for social service delivery, mental health interventions, and telehealth. Increased opportunities for online instruction have expanded opportunities for guest lectures, field education supervision, and hybrid and online course delivery. COVID-19 precipitated unprecedented mental health need in young people, and made it less taboo for young people to talk about their mental health. Faculty experience more mental health self-disclosures and requests for accommodations than in pre-pandemic years. Students are more resistant to unpaid internships and are seeking payment or stipends. Schools of Social Work are encouraging agencies to provide wages or stipends to interns. By 2033, the demand for school social workers is expected to increase 5%, demand for healthcare social workers by 10%, and demand for mental health and substance abuse social workers by 11%.

Major findings of this program review self-study

The School of Social Work B.S.W. Program is vibrant and dynamic. The School received full reaffirmation for eight years from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), ending in February 2031. The quality of students is high, and faculty continue to be productive regarding scholarship, teaching, and service. Student enrollment is up, and the program's administration and staffing has stabilized. Admission and program requirements were updated to ensure greater student access to the program and promote student success. The School of Social Work is in sore need of additional personnel including two tenure-track faculty and one administrative professional to assist with advisement and retention efforts and assist with placing and supporting students at practicum sites. The School also needs additional funding to maintain its traditional programming for a growing number of students.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle

The School will continue to request two tenure-track faculty hires in its annual budget request and an additional Administrative Professional to augment student support efforts. The School will update its recruitment material and redesign its website to more effectively represent the program. Additional options for the Honors Learning Experiences and Capstone Projects will be developed and the program will be featured prominently on the program website and in recruiting and program materials. Recruitment and retention effort for all students, will be refined with the help of on-campus specialists. A plan for greater alumni engagement will be implemented. The faculty will explore options for an accelerated pathway to the Illinois State University M.S.W. program, revise the Grievance Policy, and explore the feasibility of implementing CSWE's new field policy that allows institutions to grant field credit to students employed at agencies in jobs that meet the 9 CSWE competencies.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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

The Academic Planning Committee commends the program on the development of a thorough and transparent self-study report. The committee appreciates the thoughtful integration of the reaccreditation process with the program review and notes the active engagement of faculty, staff, alumni, and the program's advisory board in the process. The committee congratulates the program on its successful reaccreditation by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) through 2031. The program demonstrates a strong alignment with CSWE's competency-based standards, and the curriculum is clearly sequenced, scaffolded, and connected to real-world practice through a robust 500-hour practicum requirement.

The committee commends the program's deep commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). With 42% of students from underrepresented groups in 2023 (compared to the university's 30.7%), the program is a campus leader in fostering an inclusive academic environment. Recruitment from community colleges and the use of holistic admissions practices further enhance diversity and access.

The committee acknowledges the program's complex internal governance structure. While this system reflects a collaborative culture and supports accreditation compliance, the committee encourages the program to evaluate whether it remains optimally efficient given the program's relatively small faculty size.

The committee recognizes that the program's junior-year entry point introduces both benefits and challenges. While it ensures alignment with accreditation standards, it may complicate transparency for students and obscure institutional data on student retention and success. The committee encourages the program to explore earlier engagement or entry options and to improve clarity on its website.

Enrollment trends are stable and slightly increasing. The program welcomed a 77-student junior cohort in Fall 2024, up from 56 in Fall 2023. Recruitment efforts, particularly through community college outreach and digital marketing, have contributed to this growth. The committee encourages the program to collaborate with institutional leadership to ensure the infrastructure supports continued growth.

Student retention from junior to senior year is excellent, regularly exceeding 95%, and the program's time-to-degree rates consistently meet or surpass university averages, with notable recovery after the COVID-19-impacted cohort. The committee commends the program's responsiveness to student concerns, including reducing the required practicum hours from 600 to 500 and streamlining prerequisite requirements to improve access and reduce time to degree.

The committee appreciates the breadth of co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities offered. Students participate in civic engagement through Advocacy Day, Social Work Month events, and community partnerships. The annual poverty simulation is notable, and while impactful, the committee encourages continued review to ensure sensitivity to students with lived experiences of poverty.

Despite these strengths, the committee notes opportunities for improvement. Honors Program participation remains low, with only one Honors contract completed in 2023. Undergraduate student involvement in research beyond required presentations is limited, in part due to the field-heavy curriculum. The program is encouraged to explore ways to engage lower-division students earlier in the Honors pipeline.

The committee also highlights concerns about the gender imbalance in the program—only 10% of students identify as male—and recommends continued efforts to recruit more gender-diverse cohorts.

The committee acknowledges faculty commitment to teaching, scholarship, and service. Civic engagement and community-based research are particularly strong. The program's partnerships, including with First Star Academy, demonstrate meaningful integration of practice, service, and learning.

The committee notes that while the aspirational program analysis was well-executed, the comparator program analysis remains incomplete. The program is asked to complete this analysis using the model developed by its graduate counterpart.

Follow-up Report.

Comparator Analysis. The committee has included analyses of comparator and aspirational institutions in the self-study report outline to provide faculty members opportunities to consider the niche the program has among its peers and to gather information for program planning. The committee asks that program faculty return to this analysis to identify the program niche among comparator programs at Illinois public universities and to identify actions faculty could take to enhance the program with respect to the quality indicators faculty have prioritized. Accordingly, the committee asks faculty to revisit their discussions of comparator institutions and to summarize findings of those discussions in a report submitted to the Office of the Provost by October 1, 2026.

Recommendations.

The Academic Planning Committee appreciates the work of the Department of Social Work faculty and staff in preparing this self-study report. The program demonstrates strong alignment with accreditation expectations and institutional goals. The committee congratulates the B.S.W. in Social Work program on a successful review. In addition to recognizing the program's accomplishments, the committee offers the following recommendations to be addressed during the next review cycle, with outcomes and actions to be included in the next program self-study. The next program review for the B.S.W. in Social Work is tentatively scheduled for October 1, 2032.

Review and assess the internal committee and governance structure. Examine whether the current structure remains efficient and sustainable and consider streamlining while maintaining the collaborative culture and accreditation compliance.

Re-evaluate the timing and communication of the program's application process. Ensure that the program's website clearly communicates the sophomore-year application requirement. Consider whether earlier application options could better support student transparency and engagement. Assess implications of the junior-entry model.

Consider how this structure intersects with advising capacity, student retention, and institutional reporting. Explore options for improved integration and visibility of social work pathways for lower-division students.

Continue implementing and refining the student learning outcomes assessment plan. The committee encourages faculty to continue their implementation of the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program during the next program review cycle, to continue to utilize information gathered through plan implementation to make program revisions as necessary, and to document how that has been done. The committee encourages faculty to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in assessing student learning to identify any modifications to the plan faculty may deem necessary.

Continue curricular innovation. Explore opportunities for more substantive curriculum changes that reflect evolving social work practices and student needs. Monitor and assess the impact of experiential learning activities such as the poverty simulation and similar activities to ensure alignment with inclusive pedagogy and student wellbeing.

Revisit the program's Honors participation strategy. Identify ways to engage freshmen and sophomores in Honors opportunities and explore barriers to participation given the structured upper-division curriculum.

Continue collaborations with Milner Library. Build upon a strong existing relationship to evaluate and maintain resource availability. Consider expanding digital resources, integrating information fluency outcomes and assessment into the curriculum, and integrating library tools into assessment plans. Such efforts ensure that both faculty and students have ongoing access to the information and skills needed for effective scholarship.

Stakeholder engagement. Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with appropriate stakeholders throughout the college, university, and external audiences to ensure a smooth transition to becoming a school is encouraged. Consider leveraging the program's high job placement rates to further improve relationship with alumni and employers. Utilize tools such as SteppingBlocks to improve knowledge of alumni outcomes and maintain post-graduation connections.