

**REVIEW OF THE MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (M.S.W.)**  
**Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 44.0701**  
 Social Work

**OVERVIEW**

The Master of Social Work (M.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 academic programs, the Bachelor of Social Work (B.S.W.) and the M.S.W., along with a post-M.S.W. certificate in School Social Work. The M.S.W. program prepares students for advanced social work practice through two specializations: Child and Family Practice and School Social Work. Students without a B.S.W. degree complete a 60-hour program, while those with a B.S.W. earned within the past eight years are eligible for a 30-hour advanced standing program. The curriculum is grounded in the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) competencies and is aligned with the School's mission to promote social and economic justice, human dignity, and community service. Graduates are prepared for leadership roles in diverse social service settings, with many pursuing licensure as Licensed Social Workers (LSW) or Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW), and those in the School Social Work specialization pursuing the Professional Educator License (PEL) through the Illinois State Board of Education. The program fosters an inclusive learning environment and emphasizes both academic excellence and applied community engagement through rigorous field placements and co-curricular events like the Social Justice Action Forum.

**Enrollment, 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
Child and Family Practice sequence	40	39	43	46	33	31	30	39
School Social Work sequence	21	20	15	23	27	29	25	25
Gerontology Practice sequence	6	6	6	3	-	-	-	-
Total	67	65	64	62	60	60	55	64

**Degrees Conferred, Graduating Fiscal Year, 2017-2024**  
**B.S.W., in Social Work, Illinois State University**  
 First Majors Only

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Child and Family Practice sequence	18	17	12	18	19	14	12	10
School Social Work sequence	6	4	12	6	5	6	13	11
Gerontology Practice sequence	5	3	2	3	4	-	-	-
Total	29	24	26	27	28	20	25	21

\*Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2019 consists of the following terms: summer 2020, fall 2020, and spring 2021. Degrees by sequence for 2015 were not available. The Gerontology Practice sequence was disestablished effective May 16, 2021.

## **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 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 M.S.W. Director of Student Services, the Director of Field Education, and the M.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**

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 30 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 30 credit hours in social work foundation courses before entering advanced social work study. Once in the advanced curriculum, students select from two 30-credit 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. 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 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 Field Education (internship coordinator), the Director of M.S.W. Student Services (advisor), and the Director of B.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:

1. to foster students' identification and conduct as professional social workers who engage in life-long professional development;
2. 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;
3. to prepare students for social, organizational, community, economic, and policy change to advance human rights and create a more just society;

4. 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;
5. 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 offering the option for a 1-year advanced standing School Social Work program and partnering with other academic units to offer an accelerated 4 + 1 program for non-social work undergraduates hoping to enroll in the ISU School of Social Work M.S.W. program.

### **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. Throughout most of the review period, the M.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 site visitors, it replaced the elaborate course embedded assessment plan with the Social Work Education Assessment Project (SWEAP) platform in 2024.

### **Specialized accreditation**

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

### **Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review**

There were seven recommendations from the last review cycle:

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. 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;
4. Continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program improvements and document how that has been addressed;
5. 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;
6. 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
7. 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.

Since the last program review, the School developed alternative ways to recruit students including utilizing a social media campaign. Trauma-infused content was added to all masters-level courses. The M.S.W. program developed the required practicum seminar SWK 422 as an online course and developed the SWK 420: Social Determinants of Health elective as an online course. Student success on the ten competencies is measured annually with data embedded in each required course, including in the field education learning contract. Content-relevant outcomes are

examined and responded to within each content committee. Annual program chats are reviewed by the Program Directors, School Director, and Curriculum Committee who address students' concerns where appropriate. The School of Social Work has been intentional in recruiting male faculty and staff, with a net gain of four male faculty and staff members since 2015. The School has an active and engaged 29-member Community Advisory Board, most of whom are alumni. We have an active presence in area schools and agencies, where many of our practicum supervisors are alumni. We have an active Meta Suite (Instagram and Facebook) with 858 followers, many of whom are alumni. The School of Social Work only has funds for two half-time graduate assistantships. It uses temporary funds to fund a graduate assistant for the First Star Academy Program. In lieu of tuition waivers, the M.S.W. program gratefully received twenty-seven \$2,000 scholarships it utilizes to recruit students.

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

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 than in pre-pandemic years, privately and in classroom settings. This has necessitated private and classroom conversations about self-care for building resilience, including the self-care of seeking professional supports as needed. The university's mental health supports, including the Redbird Care Team, have become more essential than ever.

### **Major findings of this program review self-study**

The School of Social Work M.S.W. program is strong. In 2023, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Commission on Accreditation reaffirmed the program's accreditation until 2031 for the maximum eight-year period. The current staff in the School of Social Work is stable, energetic, and highly motivated to achieve the program's goals. The School of Social Work is a leader in campus diversity efforts and remains one of the most diverse and inclusive units at Illinois State University. At times, reaching our admission target has been challenging, partly due to the Admission Committee's uncertainty about faculty availability from year to year. The primary resource the School needs to maintain the quality of our program and support program initiatives is the fulfilment of two new tenure-track faculty lines. It is crucial the School maintains its instructional capacity and meets its CSWE mandated faculty-to-student ratio at no greater than 1:12 (Accreditation Standard 4.2.3). The School needs additional faculty members to limit enrollment in Practice and Field Seminar courses to an average enrollment of 15 students per course, and Policy, Research, And Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) courses to nearly 30 per course.

### **Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle**

1. The School will continue to request two tenure-track faculty hires in their annual budget request;
2. The School will work with Enrollment Management to secure resources to update recruitment materials. It will refine its recruitment and retention strategies and redesign the program website, so it more effectively represents the School of Social Work to prospective students.
3. The Program Director and the Director of Student Services will consult with the newly hired College of Arts and Sciences Director of Student Success, Recruitment, and Retention regarding strategies to better recruit and support students;
4. The School Director will collaborate with the Alumni Engagement office to develop a systematic plan for engaging alumni. The School will partner the National Association of Social Workers-Illinois chapter to conduct outreach to alumni, and
5. The faculty will continue to explore program options such as an online program, a 1-year School Social Work specialization, a 4+ 1 accelerated program, and the addition of more online and hybrid courses.

## **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 Master of Social Work (M.S.W.) program to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee commends the School of Social Work for preparing a thorough and reflective self-study report, which effectively draws on both internal assessment practices and recent external accreditation activities. The report was thoughtfully developed with input from faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders, and it aligns with both university strategic goals and the ethical and professional standards of the discipline.

The committee acknowledges the program's successful eight-year reaccreditation by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), which is indicative of a strong, well-aligned curriculum that prepares students for advanced professional practice in social work. The curriculum adheres to CSWE's competencies and practice behaviors, and includes clear academic pathways for both generalist and specialized practice.

The committee commends the program's ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism, both in its curriculum and through co-curricular initiatives such as the annual Social Justice Action Forum (SJAF) and the work of the Anti-Racism Committee. These efforts extend beyond compliance and demonstrate an embedded, systemic commitment to social justice within the School's culture and pedagogy.

The committee recognizes that student success is a clear priority within the program. The School provides proactive advising, clear academic expectations, and access to student support resources, including regular advising check-ins and the use of a Student Support Committee to monitor and intervene when necessary. Retention rates are generally at or above institutional averages, particularly when accounting for advanced standing students.

The committee was also pleased to see evidence of experiential learning, civic engagement, and applied research integrated throughout the student experience. All students complete extensive field placements, participate in community-based projects, and present research through required coursework and university venues such as the Research Symposium. The program maintains strong relationships with more than 75 community partners and tracks high levels of civic engagement outcomes among faculty and students.

The committee appreciates the program's clear articulation of student learning outcomes and assessment practices. Learning outcomes are embedded in the curriculum and aligned with national standards. While the new assessment plan reflects thoughtful planning, the committee encourages refinement to more clearly differentiate graduate-level learning expectations and ensure assessment measures capture advanced competencies.

The committee acknowledges that program enrollments remain strong, with recent efforts—such as digital marketing campaigns and improved scholarship packaging—supporting continued stability. The program has an enrollment target of approximately 60–64 students and has maintained this level consistently over the review period. However, the committee notes inconsistencies in enrollment data between internal and institutional sources and encourages improved transparency in future reporting.

The committee also recognizes the program's efforts to recruit and support a diverse student body, with underrepresented students comprising 25–37% of enrollment in recent years. The committee commends intentional recruitment strategies, including outreach to practicing professionals and targeted efforts in more diverse geographic areas.

### **Recommendations.**

The Academic Planning Committee appreciates the work of the School of Social Work in developing a comprehensive and thoughtful program review report. The M.S.W. program is a critical contributor to the university's mission and to the preparation of highly qualified, ethically grounded professionals in a high-need field. The committee provides the following recommendations for consideration. These should be addressed in the next regularly scheduled review. A summary of actions taken in response should be included in the self-study report tentatively due October 1, 2032.

**Clarify and improve enrollment data reporting.** While program enrollments remain within target ranges, discrepancies between institutional and program-level data should be resolved. The program is encouraged to clearly define how part-time, full-time, and advanced standing students are counted and tracked.

**Refine graduate-level assessment practices.** The committee encourages continued development of the student learning outcomes assessment plan to better reflect graduate-level competencies. Faculty are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and document how data are used to inform program improvements.

**Monitor faculty capacity and ensure sufficient instructional support.** Faculty turnover and limited instructional capacity have affected admissions and program operations in recent years. The committee supports continued efforts to advocate for faculty hires to maintain quality and support potential program expansion.

**Sustain efforts to support student financial access.** The committee recognizes the program's recent progress in securing additional scholarships for incoming students and encourages continued advocacy for expanded financial support, including graduate assistantships, especially to support the recruitment and retention of students from underrepresented groups.

**Maintain and expand equity and anti-racism efforts.** The committee commends the program's strong record in EDI and anti-racist education and encourages continued investment in faculty development, inclusive curriculum, and co-curricular programming.

**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.

**Continue to enhance alumni engagement and outcome tracking.** The committee encourages the faculty to continue to refine their plan for tracking program alumni and use this system to enhance alumni networking and engagement. These activities may become even more important in the years ahead as the program's alumni become more diverse. The program could benefit from increased involvement of its alumni, employers, and other external stakeholders in providing input regarding the program and in mentoring students and provide employment opportunities for program graduates. Utilize new tools such as SteppingBlocks to improve knowledge of alumni outcomes and maintain post-graduation connections.