

# UNIVERSITY AND SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM POLICIES

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK | UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA

There are several critical policies and standards with which all applicants to the UW Tacoma Master of Social Work (MSW) Program should review carefully and become familiar. These sections are important for applicants to better understand the qualities and professional behavior expectations required of students.

## ESSENTIAL SKILLS, VALUES AND STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Essential skills, values and standards of professional conduct are part of the academic standards. They are the physical, cognitive, emotional and character requirements necessary to participate fully in all aspects of social work education and the practice of social work. The expectation is that students will possess and develop these skills, values and standards as they progress through all aspects of the program, including in the classroom, in their field placements, and in the professional practice of social work. Attention to them will be paid by faculty responsible for making admissions decisions and for evaluating students' classroom and practicum performance. Violations of these Skills, Values, and Standards of Professional Conduct can also become grounds for dismissal from the program and from the profession. Thus, it is important that they are well understood.

### ESSENTIAL SKILLS

**Motor and Sensory.** Developing the competencies needed to become a social worker is a lengthy and complex process that requires students to participate in the full spectrum of experiences and requirements of the curriculum. The social work student must have sufficient motor abilities to attend class and perform all the responsibilities expected of students in practicum placement, at places such as hospitals and clinics. The student must also have the ability to acquire and integrate new information through the use of their senses to perform the functions that will be expected of them both as students and as professional social workers. Students who wish to request reasonable accommodations for meeting the Essential Motor and Sensory Skills requirement should contact the Office of Disability Resources for Students (DRS). DRS provides services to enrolled students who have a documented permanent or temporary physical, psychological or sensory disability that qualifies them for academic accommodations under the law.

**Knowledge Base for Social Work Practice.** The professional activities of social work require that students be grounded in relevant social, behavioral and biological science knowledge and research. This includes knowledge and skills in relationship building, data gathering, assessment, interventions and evaluation of practice.

**Interpersonal and Communication Skills.** The social work student must demonstrate the interpersonal skills needed to relate effectively to other students, faculty, staff, clients and other professionals. These include compassion, objectivity, integrity and the demonstration of respect for, and consideration of others. The social work student must communicate effectively and sensitively with other students, faculty, staff, clients and other professionals. They must express ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and ability to listen to others. They must have sufficient skills in spoken and written English to understand the content presented in the program.

### VALUES

For admission to and continuance in the School of Social Work at the University of Washington, students must demonstrate a commitment to the core values of social justice and diversity. These values are critical to social work education and practice.

**Social Justice.** The social work student must value social justice, which includes promoting equality and human rights and recognizing the dignity of every human being.

**Diversity.** The social work student must appreciate the value of human diversity. They must serve in an appropriate manner all persons in need of assistance, regardless of the person's age, class, race, religious affiliation (or lack thereof), gender, disability, sexual orientation and/or value system. Social work students must not impose their own personal, religious, sexual, and/or cultural values on their clients. The social work student must know how their values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions and past experiences affect their thinking, behavior and relationships. The student must be willing to examine and change their behavior when it interferes with their working with clients and other professionals. The student must be able to work effectively with others in subordinate positions as well as with those in authority.

## **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

The social work student must abide by the ethical standards of the profession developed by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. In general, the social work student must behave professionally by knowing and practicing within the scope of social work, respecting others, being punctual and dependable, prioritizing responsibilities and completing assignments on time. The social work student must learn to be resilient in the face of the undesirable effects of stress and avoid burnout by exercising appropriate self-care including the development of cooperative and facilitative relationships with colleagues and peers.

Adapted from the NASW Code of Ethics:

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- (a) Social work students and professionals should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research.
- (a) Social work students and professionals may disclose confidential information when appropriate with valid consent from a client or a person legally authorized to consent on behalf of a client.
- (b) Social work students and professionals should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service unless sharing confidential information is necessary to preventing serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person.

### **Sexual Relationships and Physical Contact**

- (a) Under no circumstances should social work students and professionals engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current or former clients, whether such contact is consensual or forced.
- (b) Social work students and professionals should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with clients' relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client.
- (c) Social work students and professionals—not their clients, their clients' relatives, or other individuals with whom the client maintains a personal relationship—assume the full burden for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.
- (d) Social work students and professionals should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as hugging or massaging clients). Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact.

### **Respect**

- (a) Social work students and professionals should treat colleagues and clients with respect and should represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of colleagues.
- (b) Social work students and professionals should avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues and clients in communications with others. Unwarranted negative criticism may include demeaning comments that refer to level of competence or to individuals' attributes such as race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

### **Unethical Conduct of Colleagues**

- (a) Social workers should take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues.
- (b) Social workers should be knowledgeable about established policies and procedures for handling concerns about colleagues' unethical behavior. Social workers should be familiar with national, state, and local procedures for handling ethics complaints. These include policies and procedures created by NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, employers, agencies, and other professional organizations.
- (c) Social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek resolution by discussing their concerns with the colleague when feasible and when such discussion is likely to be productive.

*Approved by SSW Faculty Council, June 2011. Updated November 2018 to reflect gender-inclusive language.*