SOCIAL WORK, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)

Program goals

VCU's Ph.D. in Social Work program is a research-oriented educational enterprise with a mission to develop scholars and leaders for education and practice in human services. Its vision is a program that builds and nurtures students' intellectual curiosity, creativity and courage, as well as their desire to "make a difference." The program is built around excellence in teaching, mentorship and socialization of students, as well as collaborative involvement in the program by its diverse faculty. Graduates of the program become active in teaching, consultation, research, practice and program evaluation, staff and program development, policy analysis and advocacy. They are employed in universities and colleges and in human service organizations and agencies at the local, state, national and international levels. In all the program's activities and events, emphasis is placed on the following areas:

1. The development of an intellectual community that values critical and creative thinking
2. The connections among the philosophy of science, theory, research and practice
3. The analysis and integration of knowledge and values, especially their relevance to diverse populations and issues of social justice

Student learning outcomes

1. A critical understanding of multiple paradigms in the philosophy of science and the implications of these for contemporary research
2. Mastery of a range of research methodologies and data analysis strategies and competence in conducting independent inquiry on issues of importance to the field
3. Competence in the analysis and application of a wide range of social, behavioral and practice theories
4. An ability to design and propose theoretically and empirically grounded models of social work intervention for coping with personal transitions and challenges, addressing social problems and promoting equity and social justice
5. A critical understanding of the historical place of social work and social welfare in the evolution of social thought and cultural values
6. Expertise in a chosen substantive area related to social work, including skills related to dissemination of this knowledge
7. Familiarity and beginning expertise about the exchange and dissemination of professional knowledge via submissions and presentations to meetings, journals and other professional outlets

VCU Graduate Bulletin, VCU Graduate School and general academic policies and regulations for all graduate students in all graduate programs

The VCU Graduate Bulletin website documents the official admission and academic rules and regulations that govern graduate education for all graduate programs at the university. These policies are established by the graduate faculty of the university through their elected representatives to the University Graduate Council.

It is the responsibility of all graduate students, both on- and off-campus, to be familiar with the VCU Graduate Bulletin as well as the Graduate School website (http://www.graduate.vcu.edu) and academic regulations in individual school and department publications and on program websites. However, in all cases, the official policies and procedures of the University Graduate Council, as published on the VCU Graduate Bulletin and Graduate School websites, take precedence over individual program policies and guidelines.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on academic regulations for graduate students. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-reg/grad/candidacy)

Degree candidacy requirements

A graduate student admitted to a program or concentration requiring a final research project, work of art, thesis or dissertation, must qualify for continuing master’s or doctoral status according to the degree candidacy requirements of the student’s graduate program. Admission to degree candidacy, if applicable, is a formal statement by the graduate student’s faculty regarding the student’s academic achievements and the student’s readiness to proceed to the final research phase of the degree program.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following degree candidacy policy as published in the VCU Graduate Bulletin for complete information and instructions.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on degree candidacy requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-reg/grad/candidacy)

Comprehensive exam/admission to candidacy

Upon completion of all required course work, students are required to take a comprehensive exam under the supervision of a comprehensive examination committee. Through the comprehensive examination, students must demonstrate the ability to integrate the whole of their educational experience by adequately addressing complex questions pertinent to the current and developing knowledge base of the human service field. Students must register for a minimum of one credit hour of independent study (SWKD 792) in the semester in which they take the comprehensive examination.

Upon successful completion of all portions of the comprehensive exam, students are approved for degree candidacy and for registration for a minimum of one credit hour of dissertation research.

If one or more portions of the examination are not passed upon the first attempt, the student receives a mark of I in the independent study course and the following semester reattempts all (or portions) of the comprehensive examination one additional time. The grade of I is changed to A upon successful completion of the comprehensive exam on the second attempt and results in approval of degree candidacy and registration for dissertation research. If a student fails to pass all portions of the comprehensive examination a second time the grade of I is changed to F in the independent study course and the student is dismissed from the program. If a student chooses not to attempt the failed portion(s) of the comprehensive examination a second time, the grade of I is changed to F in the independent study course and the student is dismissed from the program.

Dissertation

After admission to candidacy, students proceed to propose, complete and defend their dissertations. The dissertation is completed under
the supervision of a dissertation committee. A cumulative total of at least 15 credit hours of dissertation research must be completed in order to receive the Ph.D.; however, students may register for as many credits as needed/desired. Students are required to maintain continuous enrollment of at least three credit hours per semester (excluding summer) until they have attained 12 hours of dissertation credit, after which they may enroll for as few as one credit per semester. The dissertation must represent independent research and should be based on an original question or hypothesis relevant to social work. Successful defense of the dissertation, after the completion of 54 hours of course work and dissertation credits, completes the requirements for the degree.

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive examinations and entering candidacy, doctoral candidates enroll in SWKD 898 every fall and spring semester until graduation. Candidates must have successfully defended their dissertation proposal within four consecutive academic terms (fall and spring semesters), inclusive of the semester entering candidacy. Failure to have successfully defended the dissertation proposal within the time limit specified above will result in an unsatisfactory grade (U) in the fourth term of enrollment in SWKD 898. Failure to successfully defend the dissertation proposal by the end of the next fall or spring semester will result in another U grade in SWKD 898 and dismissal from the program. The semester limits noted above for successfully defending the dissertation proposal are in effect whether a candidate is actively matriculated or on a leave of absence.

**Graduation requirements**

As graduate students approach the end of their academic programs and the final semester of matriculation, they must make formal application to graduate. No degrees will be conferred until the application to graduate has been finalized.

Graduate students and program directors should refer to the following graduation requirements as published in the Graduate Bulletin for a complete list of instructions and a graduation checklist.

Visit the academic regulations section for additional information on graduation requirements. (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info)

Apply online at graduate.admissions.vcu.edu (http://wwwgraduate.admissions.vcu.edu).

**Admission requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Semester(s) of entry</th>
<th>Deadline dates</th>
<th>Test requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>Fall only</td>
<td>Jan 15</td>
<td>GRE-General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special requirements**

- Submit all additional application materials (personal statement, reference letters, writing sample and resume/curriculum vita) through the Graduate Admissions Office. If desired, an additional copy may be sent directly to the School of Social Work c/o Leslie Choplin, Ph.D., program assistant.

In addition to the general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/admission-requirements), applicants must meet the following minimum requirements.

Applicants to the program must have an earned master’s degree in social work or a closely related discipline, as well as professional experience relevant to their career goals. The relationship between the applicants’ professional experiences and their career objectives should be clearly articulated in the personal statements submitted with the application materials.

Applicants whose career goals include teaching in a bachelor’s- and/or master’s-level social work program should be aware that an M.S.W. degree and social work practice experience, along with the Ph.D., are often considered to be minimal job requirements. In addition, Council on Social Work Education accreditation standards currently require that individuals who want to teach practice courses, in particular, must have an M.S.W. and at least two years of post-M.S.W. practice experience.

The Graduate Record Examination (General Test including verbal, quantitative and analytic sections) is required. There is no minimum threshold for acceptance. Applicants are strongly advised to take the examination by December to ensure scores are received by the priority application date of Jan. 15. For more information on the GRE, visit gre.org (https://www.ets.org/gre). The institution code for VCU is 5570.

The normal course of study is full-time. While it is possible, in some cases, to combine a limited amount of course work with outside employment, all students must complete at least one year of full-time study prior to admission to candidacy.

**Degree requirements**

In addition to general VCU Graduate School graduation requirements (http://bulletin.vcu.edu/academic-regs/grad/graduation-info), students must meet the following requirements.

A minimum of 54 graduate credit hours is required, which comprises 27 hours of core course work common for all students, nine credit hours of electives selected individually to suit the student’s course of study, three credit hours of directed research and a minimum of 15 credit hours of dissertation research. The Graduate School requires for candidacy exams and dissertation committees apply to students in this program.

Up to six credit hours may be granted for courses completed at another university. Full-time students ordinarily complete 18 to 20 credit hours per academic year.

The Ph.D. curriculum is designed for students to specialize in a substantive area and increase their relevant research skills. Students take three hours of directed research (SWKD 797) in preparation for their independent dissertation research and nine hours of elective credit, which includes three credit hours of advanced statistics and/or research courses, and another six credit hours of elective courses or independent study customized to their areas of interest. In addition to elective courses offered by the program, students may enroll in appropriate courses in other schools and departments at VCU with approval of their advisers. A minimum of 39 credit hours of course work, as outlined above, is required before admission to candidacy.

**Curriculum requirements**

**Core curriculum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWKD 701</td>
<td>Quantitative Research Methods</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWKD 702</td>
<td>Quantitative Data Analysis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWKD 703</td>
<td>Philosophical Issues in Social Work Knowledge Building</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWKD 704</td>
<td>Multiparadigim Qualitative Methods and Analysis</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## SWKD 705

**Multivariate Analysis in Social Work and Human Services Research**

3

## SWKD 708

**Social Science Foundations for Social Work**

3

## SWKD 710

**Social Work, Social Welfare and Social Thought**

3

## SWKD 715

**Development and Evaluation of Social Work Practice Theories and Models**

3

## SWKD 798

**Integrative Seminar**

1

**Total Hours**

27

### Electives

**Advanced statistics and/or research courses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOS/STAT 513</td>
<td>Mathematical Statistics I</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS/STAT 514</td>
<td>Mathematical Statistics II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 553</td>
<td>Biostatistical Methods I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 554</td>
<td>Biostatistical Methods II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 571</td>
<td>Clinical Trials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 572</td>
<td>Analysis of Biomedical Data I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOS 625</td>
<td>Categorical Data Analysis and Generalized Linear Models</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BIOS 631</td>
<td>Mixed Models and Longitudinal Data Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIOS 647</td>
<td>Survival Analysis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BIOS 688</td>
<td>Applied Bayesian Biostatistics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 651</td>
<td>Intermediate Epidemiologic Methods for Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPID 652</td>
<td>Advanced Epidemiologic Methods and Data Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBHD 633</td>
<td>Structural Equation Modeling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBHD 636</td>
<td>Community-based Participatory Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 546</td>
<td>Linear Models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT/BIOS 621</td>
<td>Nonparametric Statistical Methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 626</td>
<td>Complex Sampling Designs and Variance Estimation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 642</td>
<td>Design and Analysis of Experiments I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 643</td>
<td>Applied Linear Regression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAT 675</td>
<td>Time Series Analysis I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>STAT 744</td>
<td>Regression II</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SWKD 722</td>
<td>Evaluation of Human Service Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWKD 724</td>
<td>Constructivist Inquiry</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWKD 791</td>
<td>Topical Seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>URSP 621</td>
<td>Introduction to Geographic Information Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>URSP 622</td>
<td>Community Socioeconomic Analysis Using GIS</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Hours**

9

### Research

**SWKD 797**

**Directed Research**

3

**SWKD 898**

**Dissertation Research (a minimum of 15 credits)**

15

**Total Hours**

18

**Total graduate credit hours required (minimum)** 54

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In addition to elective courses offered by the program, students may enroll in appropriate courses in other schools and departments at VCU with approval of their advisers. Outside elective courses may be selected from classes at the 500 level or higher in BIOS, CCTR, CMSC, CLED, CRJS, ECSE, ECON, EDUS, ENVS, EPID, GSWS, GRTY, GVPA, GRAD, HADM, HCPR, HSEP, HGEN, HUMS, INFO, IDAS, IDDS, MASC, MATX, NURS, OVPR, PHAR, PSYC, PADM, PPAD, SBHD, SLWK, SWKD, SOCY, SEDP, STAT, SYSM, TEDU AND USRP.

**Graduate program director**

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**Program website:** socialwork.vcu.edu (http://www.socialwork.vcu.edu)