

# SOCIAL WORK, MASTER OF (M.S.W.) WITH A CONCENTRATION IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

## Program accreditation

Council on Social Work Education

Clinical social work practice involves a mutual problem-solving process in which multidimensional assessment, goal-setting, planned intervention and evaluation are prominent components, all of which are informed by current scientific knowledge. All clinical practice is grounded in the values and purposes of the social work profession. The goal of clinical social work is to promote effective coping with life challenges and transitions. This is achieved by helping people solve problems, change dysfunctional behavior, resolve emotional and interpersonal conflicts, develop and use social networks and resources, and maintain achieved capacities and strengths. This goal rests on the fundamental belief in the dignity of all human beings and in communal responsibility for all members of the multicultural society.

Please note: The School of Social Work offers two concentrations in social work practice: (a) clinical and (b) administration, planning and policy practice. According to the National Association of Social Workers (<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Clinical-Social-Work/>), "Clinical social work is a specialty practice area of social work which focuses on the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness, emotional and other behavioral disturbances. Individual, group and family therapy are common treatment modalities. Social workers who provide these services are required to be licensed or certified at the clinical level in their state of practice." The Master of Social Work degree with a concentration in administration, planning and policy practice is a macro practice degree program that was not developed with the intention to meet the educational requirements for licensure as a clinical social worker in Virginia or any other U.S. state or territory. If an applicant wants to engage in clinical social work practice and receive a clinical license, they should apply to the M.S.W. program's clinical concentration.

## Program goals

Flowing from the mission of the School of Social Work and guided by the principles of promoting social justice, human rights, diversity, cultural competence/sensitivity and ethical practice, the goals of the M.S.W. program are:

1. To provide for a generalist knowledge, skills, ethics and values essential for work with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations
2. To provide for a program that prepares students for work in concentration areas of specialization in either clinical social work or social work administration, planning and policy practice in a range of settings
3. To provide for an educational environment where students apply the profession's values and ethical principles
4. To provide for an educational environment where students gain a greater understanding of implications of diversity through education on identifying cultural strengths and ways to counteract individual and institutional prejudice, oppression and discrimination

5. To provide for an educational environment where students apply research methods to analyze and critically evaluate professional practice, programs and service delivery systems
6. To provide for an educational environment where students gain a greater understanding of advocacy and involvement in advocacy to affect social and economic justice

## Program competencies

Competency 1–Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior

Competency 2–Advance human rights and social, racial, economic and environmental justice

Competency 3–Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice

Competency 4–Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice

Competency 5–Engage in policy practice

Competency 6–Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Competency 7–Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Competency 8–Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

Competency 9–Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities

## 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-regs/>)

## 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-regs/grad/candidacy/>)

## 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 today. (<https://www.vcu.edu/admissions/apply/graduate/>)

## Admission requirements

Degree:	Semester(s) of entry:	Deadline dates:	Test requirements:
M.S.W.		*	

\* To view a list of the current admission deadlines (<https://www.socialwork.vcu.edu/programs/msw/admission.html>), visit the School of Social Work's website.

## Special requirements

- The School of Social Work requires a specific outline for the professional statement that is different from what is shown in the graduate admissions website. Please visit the School of Social Work website for this specific information.

Full-time and part-time on-campus applicants are admitted to begin study in the fall semester. Full-time and part-time online applicants are admitted in the fall, spring and summer sessions. Advanced standing on-campus applicants are admitted for the summer session and online advanced standing applicants are admitted for the summer and fall sessions. At the time of application, prospective students may apply for one of the following: full-time or part-time on-campus, full-time or part-time online, or full-time advanced standing (on-campus and online). Application forms and instructions for applying to all graduate programs are available on the **Graduate Admissions website**.

In addition to the **general admission requirements of the VCU Graduate School**, the School of Social Work has established the following minimum criteria for admission to the 60-credit hour full-time or part-time format:

1. A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university
2. A GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale from the degree-granting institution (Students with a GPA below 3.0 can write a statement or provide additional transcripts for review.)
3. Completion of the following prerequisites: two three-credit courses in the social and behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, economics), health sciences, biological sciences or humanities

Applicants who have not completed all the liberal arts prerequisites may be considered for admission but must have completed the prerequisite courses prior to enrollment and must provide official transcripts to document their completion. Courses may be completed at a community college or four-year institution. In addition to the academic requirements, the applicant must demonstrate commitment to social welfare and social justice. This should be reflected in (1) the professional statement and (2) the applicant's background, social work employment, internships and volunteer work in community agencies serving vulnerable and/or oppressed populations.

## General admission procedures

Applications will only be reviewed when they are complete and received by the deadline. This includes the application form, three letters of reference (such as from faculty, employers and/or colleagues who know the applicant's academic and work/volunteer abilities), transcripts from the undergraduate degree-awarding institution, **a professional statement based upon the outline provided on the M.S.W. website** (<http://socialwork.vcu.edu/programs/msw/admission.html>) and an employment and volunteer experience resume. The applicant is responsible for ensuring that all materials are submitted prior to the application deadline.

## Admission to the advanced standing format

The advanced standing option leads to a Master of Social Work degree upon completion of 42 credit hours. On-campus advanced standing begins in the summer semester. Online advanced standing begins twice a year, in the fall and summer semesters. The advanced standing option is offered full-time only.

Admission to advanced standing is available to a select group of students with a bachelor's degree (B.S.W.) from an undergraduate social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, completed no more than five years prior to the date of application to the M.S.W. program. The minimum requirement for admission to the advanced standing format is a 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale from the degree-granting institution.

If a student has completed a senior field practicum, they must have a minimum grade of B or pass. For applicants to the advanced standing option who have not completed a senior field placement, one of the three references must possess the capacity to evaluate the applicant's potential to succeed in a field placement. This reference should submit a letter of recommendation that articulates their estimation of the applicant's capacity to succeed in a field placement based on the applicant's performance in a work environment (e.g., in undergraduate field placements, or current or former place of employment). Potential references for this requirement include social work professors, field liaisons, field instructors and current or former employment supervisors.

Please note this requirement only applies to applicants who have not yet graduated or completed a senior field placement. For applicants who have graduated, a minimum grade of B is sufficient to discharge this

requirement, and the third letter of recommendation should be solicited from a normal source and in the same format as other letters.

Please direct any questions you might have about this requirement to M.S.W. admissions ([mswadmissions@vcu.edu](mailto:mswadmissions@vcu.edu)) or refer to the M.S.W. website (<https://socialwork.vcu.edu/programs/msw/admission.html>) for more information.

## Transfer admits

Applicants transferring from other CSWE-accredited M.S.W. programs must submit course syllabi, field practicum evaluations and a statement of good standing from the dean or director of the program from which the student is transferring. These materials must be submitted in addition to the required application form, transcripts, professional statement, resume and reference letters. No more than 30 credit hours will be accepted in transfer, and transfer credit will be awarded in accordance with university policies governing transfer credit and time limits for degree completion.

Applicants from non-social work graduate programs may transfer graduate courses that could count as electives. To do so, they must submit course syllabi for transfer evaluation. A maximum of six credit hours of elective course work may be accepted in transfer from non-social work graduate programs in accordance with Graduate School policies governing transfer credit and time limits for degree completion. Only courses that have not been applied to another degree will be eligible for transfer. No course credit is given for life or work experience.

## Course waiver information for new M.S.W. students

Students may request to be waived from courses in the M.S.W. program if they can demonstrate they have satisfactorily completed the equivalent courses. Students must present evidence of content equivalency to the M.S.W. program director and have earned an A or B grade in the courses that are the basis for the waiver request; these courses must have been completed within the past five years. A portfolio process is used to assess equivalency. Graduate students from non-M.S.W. programs, from B.S.W. programs (but not in the advanced standing format), and from B.A., B.S. or other undergraduate programs may be waived from no more than three of the following foundation courses:

Course	Title	Hours
SLWK 601 & SLWK 610	Human Behavior in the Social Environment I and Human Behavior in the Social Environment II	6
SLWK 609	Foundations of Research for Social Work Interventions and Services	3

The course waiver does not result in award of credit. Credit may be awarded only through transfer of graduate courses (see Transfer Policy). Students who are granted waivers but not transfer credit hours must take elective courses to fulfill the number of credit hours that have been waived. Students interested in pursuing a waiver for one or more of the specified foundation courses should contact the M.S.W. program office to request the Equivalency Portfolio Form(s) and instructions.

## Degree requirements

In addition to general **VCU Graduate School graduation requirements**, the regular standing format for the M.S.W. degree requires the completion of 60 credit hours of graduate study (two years of full-time study). The first 30 credit hours (generalist curriculum) may be taken in one academic

year on a full-time basis or may be extended to a maximum of two years in the structured part-time format. To earn the M.S.W. degree in the advanced standing option requires 42 credits of full-time graduate study. Students in advanced standing do not complete the generalist curriculum but instead take 12 credit hours prior to entering the concentration curriculum.

All students select a concentration for the last 30 credit hours, which can be completed in one academic year on a full-time basis or extended to a maximum of two years in the structured part-time format. Students are usually in a field instruction practicum two days each week during the generalist curriculum and three days each week during the concentration curriculum. Course credit for work or life experience is not granted in lieu of M.S.W. course credit hours.

The purpose of the Master of Social Work program is to prepare graduate-level social workers with mastery of the knowledge, values and skills essential for advanced social work practice in a multicultural society.

The generalist curriculum comprises the first 30 credit hours of the M.S.W. program. The purpose of the generalist practice, in laying the groundwork for specialized study, is to develop the knowledge and skill base necessary to apply and carry out core competencies (relationship building, problem identification, assessment, selecting and planning interventions, implementation, and evaluation) with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations. Generalist practice emphasizes critical thinking, client strengths, commitment to social work values and ethical principles, self-awareness, professional development, evidence-based decision-making, multicultural competency and social and economic justice. The generalist curriculum includes courses in social work practice, human behavior, social policy, social justice, research and field instruction.

### Concentration options

After completion of the generalist year of study or advanced standing course work, M.S.W. students choose a concentration in clinical practice or in administration, planning and policy practice. The concentration curriculum prepares graduates for active roles in practice and program evaluation and in the generation of knowledge for future practice, programs and policy.

## Clinical practice concentration

Clinical social work practice involves a mutual problem-solving process in which multidimensional assessment, goal setting, planned intervention and evaluation are prominent components, all of which are informed by current scientific knowledge. All clinical practice is grounded in the values and purposes of the social work profession. The goal of clinical social work is to promote effective coping with life challenges and transitions. This is achieved by helping people solve problems, change dysfunctional behavior, resolve emotional and interpersonal conflicts, develop and use social networks and resources, and maintain achieved capacities and strengths. This goal rests on the fundamental belief in the dignity of all human beings and in communal responsibility for all members of the multicultural society.

Clinical social work practice takes place in the context of a purposeful relationship. The conscious use of the professional self is central in building and maintaining such relationships. Interventions may involve therapeutic, supportive, educational and resource-management activities. These interventions are based on a process of strengthening and

reordering organizational structures in the lives of clients: intrapersonal (including intrapsychic), interpersonal, institutional and/or social.

## Curriculum requirements for regular standing

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Core (generalist courses)</b>		
SLWK 601	Human Behavior in the Social Environment I	3
SLWK 602	Policy, Community and Organizational Practice I	3
SLWK 603	Power, Privilege and Oppression	3
SLWK 604	Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families and Groups I	3
SLWK 605	Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families and Groups II	3
SLWK 606	Policy, Community and Organizational Practice II	3
SLWK 609	Foundations of Research for Social Work Interventions and Services	3
SLWK 610	Human Behavior in the Social Environment II	3
<b>Generalist field instruction</b>		<b>6</b>
SLWK 693 & SLWK 694	Generalist Field Instruction I and Generalist Field Instruction II	
SLWK 695	Block Generalist Field Instruction <sup>1</sup>	
<b>Concentration requirements</b>		<b>15</b>
SLWK 703	Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	
SLWK 704	Clinical Social Work Practice I	
SLWK 705	Clinical Social Work Practice II	
SLWK 709	Specialization Research for Understanding and Assessing Social Work Interventions and Services	
SLWK 710	Concentration Social Policy	
<b>Specialization field instruction (select one option)</b>		<b>6</b>
SLWK 793 & SLWK 794	Specialization Field Instruction I and Specialization Field Instruction II	
SLWK 795	Specialization Block Field Instruction <sup>1</sup>	
SLWK 796 & SLWK 797 & SLWK 798	Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters I and Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters II and Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters III	
<b>Electives</b>		<b>9</b>
Complete nine additional credit hours of electives chosen from SLWK 717-SLWK 792. Electives from outside the School of Social Work are accepted as part of the combined offerings for dual degrees and certificates (SEDP 630, GVPA 635, SEDP 501, EDUS 673, EDUS 607, SEDP 631, GRTY 601, GRTY 602, GVPA 635, and GRTY 603). Other electives from outside the school may be accepted with prior approval from the M.S.W. program director.		
<b>Total Hours</b>		<b>60</b>

Students have the option of selecting a block field placement in lieu of a course sequence, but only one field placement may be taken as a block.

The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 60.

## Advanced standing option

In the advanced standing option students do not take the generalist courses outlined above, but instead, take 12 credit hours of course work prior to their concentration year. These courses include classes in practice/human behavior, policy and research. Students will also complete a field education course with a placement that will extend throughout their concentration year of study. The purpose of this curriculum is to enhance and restore the understanding of the generalist curriculum content for entering B.S.W. students prior to entering the concentration year.

The following advanced standing courses are taken prior to the concentration courses.

Course	Title	Hours
<b>Advanced standing bridge courses</b>		
SLWK 607	Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families and Groups for Advanced-standing Students	3
SLWK 608	Social Work Practice in Organizations and Communities for Advanced-standing Students	3
SLWK 611	Social Work Research for Advanced-standing Students	3
SLWK 612	Advanced Standing Field Instruction	3
<b>Concentration courses</b>		
SLWK 703	Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	3
SLWK 704	Clinical Social Work Practice I	3
SLWK 705	Clinical Social Work Practice II	3
SLWK 709	Specialization Research for Understanding and Assessing Social Work Interventions and Services	3
SLWK 710	Concentration Social Policy	3
<b>Field instruction</b>		
Select one of the following:		6
SLWK 793 & SLWK 794	Specialization Field Instruction I and Specialization Field Instruction II	
SLWK 795	Specialization Block Field Instruction <sup>1</sup>	
SLWK 796 & SLWK 797 & SLWK 798	Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters I and Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters II and Specialization Field Instruction Extended Semesters III	
<b>Electives</b>		



Complete nine additional credit hours of electives chosen from SLWK 717-SLWK 792. Electives from outside the School of Social Work are accepted as part of the combined offerings for dual degrees and certificates (SEDP 630, GVPA 635, SEDP 501, EDUS 673, EDUS 607, SEDP 631, GRTY 601, GRTY 602, GVPA 635, and GRTY 603). Other electives from outside the school may be accepted with prior approval from the M.S.W. program director.	9
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>42</b>

1

Students have the option of selecting a block field placement in lieu of a course sequence, but only one field placement may be taken as a block.

**The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree option is 42.**

## Sample plan of study for regular standing

### Year one

Fall semester		Hours
SLWK 601	Human Behavior in the Social Environment I	3
SLWK 602	Policy, Community and Organizational Practice I	3
SLWK 603	Power, Privilege and Oppression	3
SLWK 604	Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families and Groups I	3
SLWK 693	Generalist Field Instruction I	3
<b>Term Hours:</b>		<b>15</b>

### Spring semester

SLWK 605	Social Work Practice with Individuals, Families and Groups II	3
SLWK 606	Policy, Community and Organizational Practice II	3
SLWK 609	Foundations of Research for Social Work Interventions and Services	3
SLWK 610	Human Behavior in the Social Environment II	3
SLWK 694	Generalist Field Instruction II	3
<b>Term Hours:</b>		<b>15</b>

### Year two

#### Fall semester

SLWK 703	Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Disorders	3
SLWK 704	Clinical Social Work Practice I	3
SLWK 709	Specialization Research for Understanding and Assessing Social Work Interventions and Services	3
SLWK 793	Specialization Field Instruction I	3
Elective		3
<b>Term Hours:</b>		<b>15</b>

#### Spring semester

SLWK 705	Clinical Social Work Practice II	3
SLWK 710	Concentration Social Policy	3
SLWK 794	Specialization Field Instruction II	3

Electives	6
<b>Term Hours:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Total Hours:</b>	<b>60</b>

**The minimum number of graduate credit hours required for this degree is 60.**

Students pursuing the Master of Social Work have an opportunity to combine their studies and complete other degree programs offered within the university and some outside institutions in these areas.

## Master of Divinity (M.Div)

The combination of the Master of Social Work and the Master of Divinity is a four-year professional program offered by VCU in cooperation with the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. This dual degree program prepares students for service in occupations where social work and the church's ministries intersect, enabling social workers to perform and evaluate social work practices as they relate to biblical, theological, ethical, educational and pastoral perspectives. Graduates are equipped for various forms of ministry in which clinical and administrative skills in social work are critical.

This program requires four continuous years of study and leads to an M.S.W. conferred by VCU and a Master of Divinity conferred by VUU. Students need to apply and be accepted to both programs and may begin study at either institution following the approved curriculum plan. Alternately a student may begin at either VCU or the seminary and then, in accordance with application deadlines, apply for admission to the other school during the first year of study.

## Application process

Prospective students apply to the VCU School of Social Work and VUU, must meet both sets of admission standards and must be accepted to both programs. For the M.S.W. program, refer to the Admission page (<https://socialwork.vcu.edu/programs/msw/admission.html>) of the M.S.W. website. For information about admission to VUU, contact:

Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology  
1500 N. Lombardy St.  
Richmond, Virginia 23220  
(804) 257-5715

## Gender violence intervention certificate

The dual degree and certificate program combining the Master of Social Work and Certificate in Gender Violence Intervention (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/school-government-public-affairs/gender-violence-intervention-certificate/>) is a coordinated effort among the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, the School of Social Work and community advocates working in the area of sexual and domestic violence. See the dual degree and certificate listing for details (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-cert-ops/msw-gvi-cert/>).

## Juris Doctor (J.D.)

Through a cooperative agreement with the University of Richmond T.C. Williams Law School (<https://lawcatalog.richmond.edu/dual-degree/>), selected students in either school may pursue a dual degree four-year curriculum of graduate study leading to the Master of Social Work and Juris Doctor. This program is established in recognition of the role of public law in social and economic life. The dual degree program prepares professionals to be well-versed in the values, knowledge and skills of both fields, bringing an integrated base of competency to the resolution of

human and social problems. The time normally required for completion of the integrated four-year curriculum is one academic year less than if each degree were pursued separately. Elective courses will enable students to select areas in law and social work which meet their particular interests.

Graduate program director  
s2nlee@vcu.edu  
(804) 828-6882

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

## Application process

Applicants must successfully meet the admission requirements of both schools and, upon admission, are assigned an adviser in each school. Students may begin the course work in either school, with the sequence of courses being determined by the point of entry. For more information, contact:

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## Nonprofit management certificate

Through a cooperative arrangement with the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, M.S.W. students may simultaneously earn the post-baccalaureate graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/school-government-public-affairs/nonprofit-management-certificate/>) offered by the Wilder School. Students gain knowledge and skills that they will need to become leaders and change agents in this rapidly growing sector. See the dual degree and certificate listing for details (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-cert-opps/msw-nmc-cert/>).

## Master of Public Health (M.P.H) [dual degree]

Through a collaborative program between the VCU School of Social Work and the Department of Epidemiology in the VCU School of Population Health, students complete a three-year full-time program of study, including summer course work, to obtain the Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health degrees. This dual degree program prepares graduates to work with individuals, families, groups, communities and/or organizations; to advocate for social, health care and economic justice in a diverse and multicultural society; and to promote physical and mental health across the life course. Program details (<http://bulletin.vcu.edu/graduate/dual-degree-opps/msw-mph/>) can be found in the dual degree opportunities section of this Bulletin.

## School social work certification

In conjunction with the VCU School of Education, students may meet Virginia Department of Education standards for certification as school social workers in Virginia, while completing requirements for the M.S.W. degree. Students interested in a certification in school social work should contact their advisers during the first semester of the M.S.W. program.

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Phone: (804) 828-6882

### Contact

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