



Master of Social
Work
Student Handbook
2023-2024

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Introduction

“When a flower doesn’t bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.”

– Alexander Den Heijer

Dear MSW Students:

Welcome to the MSW program at Texas A&M University-Texarkana! We are excited that you have decided to join our social work program. You have made an important and profound decision in choosing to pursue your master’s in social work. Social work is a professional degree that has the potential to afford you opportunities to work with individuals, families, communities, and organizations and to impact positive social change in all aspects of human living. As a profession, we work to champion social issues of the most vulnerable and underserved in our society.

In the TAMUT Social Work program, we take great responsibility for the role we play in not only disavowing hate, discrimination, and exclusion, but actively championing and practicing anti-bias and anti-oppressive behaviors within our organization, across campus, and in our surrounding communities. We seek to train our students to address social injustices and empower the disenfranchised through a quality education based in professional ethics and focused on trauma-informed practices and the development of specialized skills to work with rural families and communities. While this program has been designed to challenge and grow you as a social work professional, our selection of you to be part of the MSW program, says that we believe you have what it takes to be successful in our program. While engaged in your program of study, you will engage in case-based applied learning, group work, and have scholarship opportunities all designed to develop you as a field ready MSW practitioner. Our coursework offerings at Texas A&M University-Texarkana prepare our MSW graduates for careers in mental health settings, hospitals, women’s shelters, child welfare agencies, addiction treatment programs, and other a host of other specialized services for persons in need. As your new faculty and staff, we are excited that you have chosen to pursue a master’s degree in social work and are committed to your successful completion of the program.

We are pleased to be a part of your academic journey and that you have chosen to be a part of our social work family at Texas A&M-Texarkana!!!

Well Wishes,



La Tonya Noël-Wilburn, Ph.D., MSW
Associate Professor and Director of Social Work

Program Mission Statement and Goals

Mission Statement

The mission of the Texas A&M University-Texarkana Master of Social Work program is to provide students with the knowledge, abilities and skills to address regional problems such as poverty, inequality, and trauma, and to promote community health and wellbeing at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. The program is designed to accomplish this through high quality and engaged teaching and by creating and maintaining a strong link between the university and the community through field partnerships, service, and scholarship. Students will graduate as competent social workers who are job ready and prepared for the challenges they will encounter as they help strengthen their community and advance opportunities for all its citizens.

Program Goals

The TAMUT MSW program has developed the following program goals:

1. Prepare students to be social work professionals who can engage, assess, and intervene with various types of client systems and diversities.
2. Prepare students to promote racial and social justice within micro, mezzo, and macro contexts.
3. Enhance students' classroom learning through experiential and service learning to prepare them to make an impact in their field work and beyond.
4. Engage with the community and work in partnership to address local and regional concerns with evidence-based interventions.
5. Educate students in the importance of the person-in-the-environment and ecological frameworks and how they give context to providing trauma-informed care.

Clinical Goals

After the second year of course work, graduates from our clinical specialization will demonstrate an ability to:

6. Assess and/or diagnose and intervene with client systems at various systems levels
7. Analyze how social policy impact clinical practice.
8. Conduct empirical evaluations of their own practice interventions using evidenced-based practice as a guiding practice model.
9. Critically evaluate, synthesize, and articulate empirical and conceptual literature related to work with a clinical population.

Program Eligibility

The MSW is a competitive admission program. Due to current university and accreditation standards, no more than 30 students will be accepted to begin each academic year. Students submit their applications in December, are notified regarding their admission status in March,

and those who have been accepted begin the program in the following fall semester (for exact dates, visit our website at: www.tamut.edu/socialwork).

Requirements for admission to the MSW Program include:

1. Hold an earned baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university
2. Have achieved a grade point average of 2.8 overall or in the last 60 hours of academic course work

The following are recommended courses that, although not required, will help you better prepare for the MSW program:

1. Courses with substantial contents on abnormal psychology, mental health deviance, drug addictions, violence, etc.
2. Life Span Development.
3. Any biology course covering anatomy and physiology that emphasizes the impact of organic, chemical, and body systems impairments on human behavior (Note: not Introduction to Biology);
4. Social Science with Macro context. (e.g., social institutions, organizations, systems, policies. Intro to Sociology, American Government, Political Science.)

In addition to the above-mentioned requirements, favored applicants show:

1. Adherence to the highest standards of conduct and ethics.
2. Emotional maturity.
3. Leadership and problem-solving ability.
4. An aptitude for understanding and relating to people.
5. A demonstrated history of social service experience through volunteer or paid work experience in human service settings.

These skills and qualities are assessed through professional recommendations, an autobiographical statement, a critical thinking essay, student transcripts, and a resume.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee of full-time social work faculty, and if necessary (due to disagreements or a conflict of interest), arrangements have been made for another outside professional educator to review the applications as well. Applicants will be notified of the committee's decision by email only.

Admission will be granted contingent upon completing all admissions criteria prior to beginning the MSW program.

All students who meet the minimum application requirements are welcome to apply. No student will be denied admission based upon race, gender, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, culture, creed, class, ethnicity, or national origin.

Criminal conviction or pending criminal charges will not necessarily disqualify a student from admission to the MSW. However, past or future criminal activity or conduct may limit or inhibit a

student from completing a social work internship which is required to complete the degree or render the student ineligible to receive state certification or licensure to practice social work.

Meeting the minimum requirements does not guarantee admission. Students are urged to contact their academic advisor to discuss what will make them most competitive as a candidate.

Students admitted to the program are those who have a combination of excellent grades, relevant work/internship/volunteer experience, excellent recommendations from professors and/or supervisors, and a thoughtful and concise critical thinking essay. Students denied admission to the program may apply additional times as desired.

Students accepted into the MSW program must be able to take classes on campus. Course delivery is designed to be in face-to-face and hybrid formats.

For details on how to apply to the MSW program, see “**How to Apply**” on the following page.

How to Apply

To make your application to the MSW program as strong and accurate as possible, and for the benefit of the admission committee members who will be reviewing and scoring each application, please ensure that you have carefully read and followed the instructions below before submitting your application. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. Questions regarding the application process may be directed to your academic advisor.

1. Ensure that you are eligible for the program (see “Program Eligibility” section in this handbook).
2. Complete online application at <https://www.applyweb.com/texasamu/index.ftl>.
3. Provide official copies of transcripts via secure email to transcripts@tamut.edu. Students who completed their degree with TAMUT will not need to provide them.
4. Write a clear and concise critical thinking essay. This narrative should answer the following questions:
 - Describe your interest in pursuing a Master of Social Work degree at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and why it is a good fit for your educational and professional goals. Please include any relevant information from current or previous experiences (e.g. employment, volunteer, academic, and/or personal) that have influenced your decision.
 - Define a social problem affecting a population of specific interest to you that you would want to work with in the future. Please examine the relevancy of the problem to the field of social work, how you came to identify and understand it as a social problem, societal factors that have contributed to the problem, and specific ways that you, as a social worker, could address the problem.
 - Social workers are expected to work with individuals, families, groups, and communities from diverse backgrounds in a caring and respectful fashion. Using a specific experience you have had with an individual or group different than you (in terms of race, socioeconomic background, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, culture, age, etc.), discuss what challenges and lessons you learned from this situation. How did the interaction affect your personal views about this individual/group and your overall perspective on diversity?
5. Provide three professional letters of reference from employers, professors, or a combination of both. They must be on letterhead and with a signature. If an applicant has been in college within the last five years, at least one letter must be from a faculty member. No personal references will be accepted.
6. Submit a resume that details work and/or volunteer experience. (While not required, paid and/or volunteer experience in the human services is highly valued and will be seriously considered in the application evaluation process.)
7. Pay a non-refundable \$30 application fee

Deferment

Under special circumstances, students who have been accepted to the program may defer for up to one year, but they must make a written request and submit it to the MSW Program Director for approval.

MSW Degree Requirements

Students admitted to the MSW program, after having their eligibility for the program confirmed, must complete the following requirements to earn the Master of Social Work degree.

Please note academic credit will not be awarded for previous work or life experience of any kind.

The TAMUT MSW program seeks to avoid having students repeat courses in which they have successfully mastered the material. The program will utilize the following mechanism to ensure students do not repeat what has been achieved in their baccalaureate social work programs:

1. BSW graduates and students who have completed the TAMUT social work minor may request course substitution for the following courses (1) generalist courses: 1) SOCW 501, 2) SOCW, SOCW 510 – HBSE, 3) 520 - Social Welfare Policy, and 4) SOCW 530 Diversity and Social Justice. This is accomplished through written request to the program director. The procedure is as follows:
 - a. Students who meet the criteria may contact the MSW program director via email requesting to substitute specific courses.
 - b. The program director verifies the student’s eligibility by checking their transcripts.
 - c. If the student is eligible, the program director arranges for the student to provide course syllabi for each course to be substituted.
 - d. The program director reviews the syllabi to make sure the course is equivalent to the TAMUT course.
 - e. The student will be notified within two weeks of the decision.
 - f. The course substitution does not result in an award of credit. Students who are granted course substitution(s) must select elective courses to replace the credits for the courses to be substituted to meet the 60-credit hour requirement for the MSW degree.
 - g. Students must earn an “A” or “B” grade in the courses that are the basis for the waiver request.

Descriptions for the courses below can be found on the TAMUT MSW program web page located at <http://catalog.tamut.edu/graduate-studies/arts-sciences-education/social-work/#coursestext>

MSW Course Sequence

SEMESTER 1	Course Title	Cr Hours
	SOCW 500 Writing, Documentation, and Interviewing Skills	3
	SOCW 501 Practice I: Social Work with Individuals	3
	SOCW 510 Human Behavior and the Social Environment	3
	SOCW 520 Social Welfare Policy	3
	SOCW 551 Generalist Field Practicum I	4
	Semester total:	16
SEMESTER 2	Course Title	Cr Hours
	SOCW 502 Practice II: Social Work with Families and Groups	3
	SOCW 530 Diversity and Social Justice	3
	SOCW 540 Research Methods in Social Work	3
	SOCW 562 Mental Health Assessment and Diagnosis	3
	SOCW 552 Generalist Field Practicum II	4
	Semester total:	16
SEMESTER 3	Course Title	Cr Hours
	SOCW 521 Practice III: Advanced Macro Practice	3
	SOCW 560 Trauma-Informed Practice	3
	SOCW 563 Advanced Clinical Practice	3
	SOCW 553 Specialized Field Practicum I	4
	SOCW XXX Social Work Elective	3
	Semester total:	16
SEMESTER 4	Course Title	Cr Hours
	SOCW 541 Practice and Program Evaluation	3
	SOCW 564 Clinical Issues in Addictions	3
	SOCW 554 Specialized Field Practicum II	4
	SOCW XXX Social Work Elective	2
	Semester total:	12
Degree total:		60

Note: Alternative tracks may also be pursued by students needing more flexibility in their degree plan

Graduation Requirements

1. Completion of a minimum of 60 semester credits within the MSW, or with the inclusion of acceptable transfer credits. Per university policy: No more than 12 graduate credits may be transferred in. Transferred credits must have been completed from a CSWE-accredited MSW program.
2. Overall grade point average of 3.0 or above.
3. All 900 field practicum hours must be completed.

Please see your faculty advisor to create your academic plan and for an explanation of all admission and program requirements.

Policies and Procedures for Evaluating Student's Academic Performance

It is the responsibility of the faculty to evaluate each student's performance in the courses they teach and in the field practicum. Faculty use a wide variety of teaching methods to meet the diverse ways in which students learn to give them the best chance for success. Course evaluation criteria are outlined within each individual syllabus and reviewed with students at the start of each course. Students are encouraged to reach out to faculty if they are struggling in their classes to request assistance.

Faculty members review the course syllabus with students on the first day of class. They may opt to administer a syllabus quiz to check student comprehension of course expectations. In addition to holding weekly office hours, faculty have a mechanism in place for students to come to them for help outside of class. If the student has difficulties that require additional resources, the faculty member may refer the student to the Office of Student Success which helps with tutoring, writing, organizational skills, and other services. Students who need counseling are referred to the Student Counseling Center.

Student Grievance Procedures:

The MSW program follows the TAMUT policy regarding grading: A student with a grievance regarding a course grade should attempt to resolve the issue by conferring with the course instructor. A student challenging a final grade must show the instructor's judgment was unfair based upon some basis other than performance; standards different from those applied to other students in the same course section; or a substantial, unreasonable, and unannounced departure from previously articulated standards or the syllabus. The burden of proof lies with the student.

Program faculty and administration attempt to resolve all grade dispute issues at the program level. However, should the student not be satisfied with the outcome, they may file a grievance. For information regarding the formal "Grade Grievance and Appeal Process," students are referred to UP 13.02.99.H0.01 Discussion and Resolution of Grade Disputes, Grievances, and Appeal Processes, which is posted on the university's website:

https://www.tamut.edu/About/Administration/About/Rules/Archive_Rules_Procedure/13-02-99-H0-01-Grade-Disputes-and-Grievances1.pdf

Academic Standards, Probation, and Termination

Students must meet the following qualifications to continue in the MSW program:

- A minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 at the completion of each semester.
- No more than six credits with a C grade, regardless of GPA
- No grade of D or F regardless of GPA
- Adherence to applicable university policies, including the MSW Student Handbook, and the TAMUT Code of Conduct
- Adherence to the NASW Code of Ethics
- Completion of provisional or probationary requirements from an admission decision or from a previous review
- No grade of C for a readmitted student, regardless of having previously earned a grade of C or not in any attempted coursework prior to dismissal.
- Acceptance into a field placement. A student may be terminated from the program if they interview for field placement and are rejected by two field agencies that are deemed by the MSW program to provide appropriate field experiences.

The MSW Program Director communicates with students whose academic or professional performance places them at risk of dismissal. The Program Director engages at-risk students to develop a realistic plan to address the specific concern(s). The program follows the TAMUT probation and termination policy as outlined below:

TAMUT Probation Policy for Graduate Students

- Graduate students may be placed on probation after completion of 12 credit hours if the cumulative GPA is below 3.0
- Students will remain on probation until he or she raises the cumulative GPA to 3.0 or above.
- While on probation, students must maintain a semester GPA of 3.0 or higher.

TAMUT Termination Policy for Graduate Students

- At the end of a fall or spring semester, graduate students on probation will be terminated if their semester GPA and/or overall GPA fall below a 3.0.

Students on academic probation or at-risk for dismissal from the program are notified in writing and meet with the MSW Program Director and are reviewed each semester during the 12th week of the semester. Students are invited to attend and present their case for being allowed to continue in the program. Students may appeal the recommendation of the MSW Program committee by filing a written appeal to the Dean of the College of Arts, Science, and Education. Each student is provided a copy of the link to the TAMUT web site that contains the student appeal process.

When a student is terminated from the program, they receive an email notification from the program director indicating which standard was violated and the consequences for the violation, which is program dismissal. The program director notifies the dean and the registrar. When a student is terminated, they have the right to appeal in accordance with TAMUT student grievance policies located online at <http://catalog.tamut.edu/academic-information/probation-suspension-policy>.

Evaluating Student's Professional Performance

The TAMUT MSW program expects all students to obey the law, to show respect for properly constituted authority, to perform contracted obligations, to maintain absolute integrity and high standards of individual honesty in their daily lives, especially within the academic and professional environment. In short, a student enrolled in the program accepts the obligation to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner acceptable at an institution of higher learning and within the social work profession. Failure to meet these professional standards may result in a failing grade and termination from the social work program.

Because of the nature of professional social work practice, the social work program has different expectations of students than do non-professional programs. Social workers traditionally serve vulnerable and/or disadvantaged populations. The program has a responsibility to protect consumers, and to ensure that social work students are competent to begin practice and meet professional ethical standards. The program's policies are linked to the students' abilities to become effective social work professionals and are provided so that students and faculty can be clear about expectations and procedures to address academic performance concerns, which includes professional behavior.

Students are expected to abide by the TAMUT Student Code of Conduct which delineates each student's rights and responsibilities. It is found online at <https://www.tamut.edu/Campus-Life/Student-Conduct/Code.html>. The university's grievance and termination policies are explained in this document.

In addition to the university policies listed above, the MSW program expects students to exemplify professional and ethical behavior in accordance with current professional social work standards and described in the NASW Code of Ethics. For the NASW Code of Ethics in its entirety go to: <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp>. Each student is expected to read and comply with the standards found in the Code. Students who are unable or unwilling to follow the Code of Conduct and the NASW Code of Ethics will be subject to probation or termination.

Because social work is a professional program in which students have the potential to work with vulnerable populations, the program reserves the right to seek additional information such as references from employers and others. Students should also be aware that if there are any personal data such as that included on the application for state licensure that may indicate a potential threat to the public safety and welfare, a student may be denied continuance in the MSW program or encouraged to withdraw from the program. Should that situation arise, students will be assisted in finding a more suitable program/profession.

Professional Performance Disciplinary Procedure

Students are required to maintain the standards of behavior established by the university, the MSW program, and the social work profession. A student whose inappropriate behavior constitutes a significant violation or pattern of violations of professional standards (for example, failure to adhere to the NASW Code of Ethics), may be dismissed from the program.

Disciplinary Procedure

If a student falls below the professional standards or demonstrates unprofessional behavior in the classroom, in campus meetings and activities, or in practicum, it will trigger a disciplinary process. This process can be initiated by a faculty member or administrator, a practicum supervisor, another student, or a campus employee through a written complaint.

1. The complaint must be made in writing to the program director and include documentation which supports the complaint.
2. The program director will meet with the student to discuss the complaint.
3. If the complaint has merit, the director will have the option to:
 - a. Give the student a written warning.
 - b. Place them on probation for a semester or until the problem has been remediated.
 - c. Terminate them from the program.

Appeal of Termination

When the student receives notice that they have been terminated from the program and wishes to appeal the decision, the process is as follows:

1. The student writes a letter to the dean explaining why the decision is in error.
2. The student includes any documentation that supports their position.
3. The dean will consider the letter and documentation and, if needed, may request a meeting with the student to clarify the student's position.
4. The dean will make a final decision and notify the student via email within five (5) university business days.
5. The decision of the dean is final.

Field Practicum

Placement in the Field Practicum

Social Work at the graduate level is a licensed profession in Texas. Practitioners must be able to apply professional knowledge, values, and skills ethically. Practice courses provide activities for students to develop skills such as interviewing and assessment, intervention, and evaluation. Students complete field practicum to solidify the knowledge and apply it with clients under supervision. Students are assigned to social service agencies by the Field Director, with consideration of the students' interests and learning needs, and the availability of field agencies. These internships provide opportunities for students to apply knowledge and skills learned in classes to real-life situations with clients. Field practicum students are supervised and guided by professional social workers in agencies to ensure that they have productive educational experiences. The MSW program expects students to exemplify professional and ethical behavior in accordance with current professional social work standards.

Field Practicum Requirements

The field practicum requires students to complete 900 clock hours of social work. Specifically, students complete 400 hours in the generalist year and 500 hours of clinical work in the specialization year. Practicum also includes weekly attendance at a seminar on campus and enrollment in related, concurrent classes. The Field Director makes field agency assignments with input from the student and field agency staff. Most students feel that their field internships are among the most valuable experiences in the program. Field experiences often help a student narrow their choices for a field of practice within social work. Field instructors can be very helpful in assisting students with the job search process. Many students are hired by agencies in which they completed internships, or by agencies they learned of while in field.

Practicum Standards Violation

When a student fails to comply with practicum agency expectations, it will result in the following process:

1. The Field Director will meet with the agency to discuss concerns and goodness of fit for the student and agency.
2. The Field Director will request a written letter or written evaluation from the field instructor documenting their concerns.
3. The Field Director will meet together with the Program Director and the student to discuss the agency's concerns and hear the student's perspective of the situation.
4. The Field Director, in consultation with the agency, will make the final determination of student's continuation at the agency.
5. The program reserves the right to deny continuation in the program. The Program Director, Field Director, and the student's faculty advisor are charged with making decisions regarding program termination.
6. If the program denies continuation, faculty will work with the student to help determine an alternative career path.
7. The student may appeal to the dean in the same manner as for academic termination.

Participation in MSW Student Affairs

Student representation is an important part of any social work program and is a microcosm of their future work in the profession. TAMUT MSW students have organized a Social Work Student Association (SWSA) in accordance with the TAMUT clubs and organizations policy. Students are nominated and elected by their peers to assume student leadership position. The organization has developed its own constitution and bylaws.

In addition to the SWSA, student input and representation will be solicited in the following ways:

1. Two students, one in the generalist year and one in the specialization year, will serve as representatives to the MSW Program Committee to share the student perspective of program policies, academics, and activities. Each student will be elected by their own cohort, and their term of service will be one year.
2. One student will be elected as the representative to the National Association of Social Workers. They will be the TAMUT student voice to the state organization. The student will help plan and carry out the annual NASW membership drive and keep students apprised of NASW concerns and events.
3. Two students, one from the generalist year and one from the specialization year, will serve as members of the Community Advisory Board. They will represent the student voice for program policies and concerns.

Students will also be encouraged to become involved in TAMUT Student Government and other campus organizations they are interested in.

MSW Clinical Licensure

Most states regulate the practice of social work through certification or licensure. Persons without these credentials are prohibited by law from calling themselves social workers or practicing social work. The State of Texas licenses social workers at several levels: Licensed Bachelor of Social Work (LBSW), Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW), and Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). The LBSW requires a BSW from an accredited (or from a program in candidacy) and you may sit for the exam upon graduation. The LMSW and LCSW both require an MSW from an accredited program (or from a program in candidacy). For more information go to: www.dshs.texas.gov/socialwork.

Questions? Contact Us

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